CLOSURE

Kieler e-Journal für [illegible]icforschung

5

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1 Über diese Ausgabe
Das CLOSURE-Team

3 About this Issue
The CLOSURE-Team

Aufsätze

Schwerpunkt:

5 Bound to fail.
Living and working conditions in the comics industry
Katharina Brandl / Anne Elizabeth Moore

31 Aus dem Rahmen fallen / in den Rahmen fallen
Scheiternde Künstler im Comic um 1900
Christian A. Bachmann

55 The List as a Means of Assessment and Standardization and Its Critical Remediation in Graphic Narratives About Illness and Care
Anne Rüggemeier

83 ›Scheitern‹ als strukturgebendes Prinzip
Die Kunst zu fliegen (2012) von Antonio Altarriba und Kim
Daniela Kuschel

Offener Themenbereich

97 »You Can't Save The World Alone«
Zum zeitgenössischen Comicfilm in Serie
Peter Vignold

125 The ›Affected Scholar‹
Reading Raina Telgemeier's *Ghosts* (2016) as a Disability Scholar and Cystic Fibrosis-Patient
Dorothee Schneider

150 Readable Space and Practice
OCD in *Fun Home* and in *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*
Sigrid Thomsen

Über diese Ausgabe

Aus welchem Stoff werden Comic- und (Super-)Helden_innen gemacht? Sie sind das Produkt ständigen Scheiterns, Leidtragende immer wiederkehrender Niederlagen, Opfer herber Rückschläge. Missgeschicke und Defizite erleben als Gegenentwurf zu einem effizienzfixierten Perfektionismus eine positive Umwertung im öffentlichen Diskurs: Neben neunmalklugen Manager-Ratgebern, die das Scheitern als Weg zum Endziel ›Erfolg‹ preisen und es damit zu nicht mehr als einem Etappenziel degradieren, lässt eine Vielzahl von Publikationen das Scheitern als eine Verweigerungshaltung gegenüber einem ›Höher. Schneller. Weiter‹ oder zumindest als Bruch mit einer als linear beschriebenen Fortschrittserzählung verstehen. Inwiefern lassen sich Prozesse des Scheiterns im Comic beobachten, auf Produktions- bzw. Distributions-, Handlungs- oder Darstellungsebene? Dieser Frage widmet sich der Themenschwerpunkt der aktuellen Ausgabe von CLOSURE.

Vor der leeren Seite scheinen zunächst alle Comickünstler_innen gleich. Doch noch bevor das erste Panel gezeichnet ist, sind die Erfolgschancen bereits deutlich verteilt. **Katharina Brandl** und **Anne E. Moore** zeigen empirisch und systematisch die Hindernisse auf, an denen Comic-Biographien zerschellen. Ihr Beitrag »Bound to fail. Living and working conditions in the comics industry« ist ein dringend notwendiges Korrektiv für jegliche Comicforschung, die über ästhetische Fragen und Parteinahme vergisst, dass Scheitern in einer zutiefst ungleichen und diskriminierenden Szene keine Frage des Talents ist.

Der Berliner Verleger **Christian A. Bachmann** widmet sich in seinen Beitrag »Aus dem Rahmen fallen / in den Rahmen fallen« Repräsentationen von Künstler_innen in Bildergeschichten des 19. Jahrhunderts und vor allem Comics um 1900. Wenn solche selbstreflexiven Darstellungen sich dieses Typus' bedienen, greifen sie häufig auf scheiternde Figuren zurück – nicht zuletzt aufgrund des humoristischen Potentials, das diese bieten.

Anne Rüggemeier, Postdoktorandin am Freiburger Institute for Advanced Studies setzt sich mit »graphic illness narratives« wie Brian Fies' *Mom's Cancer* (2006) oder Roz Chasts *Can't we talk about something more pleasant* (2014) auseinander. Wie stellen diese beiden Comics die Diskrepanz zwischen Erwartungshaltungen und entsprechenden Realitätskonfrontationen dar? Besonderes Augenmerk legt die Autorin dabei auf das Phänomen der ›Liste‹.

In ihrem Aufsatz »Scheitern als strukturierendes Prinzip« zeigt **Daniela Kuschel** (Universität Mannheim), wie der Comic *Die Kunst zu fliegen* (2012) des spanischen Autors Antonio Altarria und des Zeichners Kim auf motivischer sowie struktureller Ebene Scheitern thematisiert. So bekommen die Flüge und Landungen der Figuren eine andere Dimension: Höhenflüge und Bruchlandungen.

Im ersten Beitrag des offenen Themenbereiches sieht **Peter Vignold**, Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am Institut für Medienwissenschaft der Ruhr-Universität Bochum, ein ›Goldenes Zeitalter‹ für Comicfilme anbrechen, nicht zuletzt beschreibt er in seinem Beitrag »You can't save the world alone« das aktuelle Phänomen des Kino-Comic-Blockbusters.

Ein weiterer Beitrag zum offenen Themenbereich ist »The ›affected scholar‹: Reading Raina Telgemeier's *Ghosts* (2016) as a Disability Scholar and Cystic Fibrosis Patient«. **Dorothee Schneider**, wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin an der Universität Kiel, vereint hierin persönliches Verständnis mit Comic-Analyse. Aus Sicht der Disabilities Studies argumentiert Schneiders Untersuchung der Repräsentation und Funktion von chronischen Krankheit im Comic *Ghosts*, dass die Einbeziehung der Betroffenen-Erfahrung zu einer wertvollen, kritischen Lesart beitragen kann.

Auch **Sigrid Thomsen**, Universitätsassistentin an der Forschungsplattform *Mobile Kulturen und Gesellschaften* an der Universität Wien, fokussiert in »Readable Space and Practice« Krankheit. Im Speziellen untersucht sie Alison Bechdels Comic *Fun Home* (2006) und Justin Greens *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1995) auf deren Darstellungsweisen von Zwangsstörungen.

Für unsere Rubrik **ComicKontext** haben wir **Marc-Oliver Frisch** gefragt, wie er die gegenwärtige Comic-Kritik beurteilt. Der langjährige Comic-Kritiker (Tagesspiegel, u. a.) spart nicht mit Kritik an der Kritik. Doch belässt Frisch es nicht dabei, scheiternden kritischen Strategien den Spiegel vorzuhalten. Seine Antwort zeigt auch auf, wie es gehen könnte, auf der Grundlage der Selbstkritik eine bessere, präzisere und vielfältigere kritische Praxis zu entwickeln. Wenn diese Kurzintervention weitere Diskussionen über kritische Comiczugänge eröffnet: An uns soll es nicht scheitern.

Und in eigener Sache: Mit #5 haben wir den Download-Dokumenten ein neues Layout gegönnt und im Webbereich können nun die Abbildungen durch Anklicken vergrößert werden. Wir stellen in kurzen Features die Kunstschaffenden unserer Cover vor, den Anfang machen **Kate Carruthers Thomas** (Cover) und **Matthias Latza** (ComicKontext). Darüber hinaus sind die Hauptbereiche unsere Homepage nun auch in englischer Sprache verfügbar – hiermit möchten wir unseren Ansatz, die Comicforschung stärker zu vernetzen, fortführen.

Wir danken den Autor_innen ebenso wie den Rezensent_innen und wünschen Ihnen und Euch viel Freude an dieser Ausgabe.

Kiel, November 2018
Das CLOSURE-Team

About this Issue

Of what stuff are comics- and (super-) heroines and heroes made? They are the product of unremitting failure, sufferers of recurring defeats, victims of severe blows. Their misadventures and weaknesses receive a positive revaluation in the public discourse. This can also be seen in contemporary smart-aleck (self-help) manager guides, in which failure is pitched, even praised, as a stepping stone on the road to success. In addition to this depiction of failure as a mere milestone, manifold publications describe failing as a refusal to comply with the motif of ›higher-faster-further‹ or at least as a rupture in the teleological narrative of progress. To what extent can the processes of failure be observed in comics? How is failure shown on the level of comic production and distribution or depicted and portrayed in narrative action? The theme of failure provides the focus for this issue of CLOSURE.

In front of the empty page, all comic-artists appear to be equal. However, even before the first panel is drawn or the first speech bubble is filled, the chances of succeeding in the comics scene are already clearly delineated. As **Katharina Brandl** and **Anne E. Moore** empirically and systematically demonstrate, issues of access, financial disadvantages, discrimination and harassment are obstacles which cause comics artists to fail. Their contribution »Bound to fail. Living and working conditions in the comics industry« is a much-needed corrective for the field of comics research, which, over focusing on questions of aesthetics and allegiance, seems to have neglected to acknowledge that in a profoundly unequal and discriminatory scene, failure is not a matter of talent.

In his contribution »Aus dem Rahmen fallen / in den Rahmen fallen« the Berlin based publisher **Christian A. Bachmann** looks at representations of artists in caricatures of the 19th Century, in particular their depictions in comics published around 1900. Often these types of self-reflexive illustrations draw on failing personas (characters), not least because of their humorous potential.

The contribution of **Anne Rüggemeier**, postdoctoral fellow at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies, examines »graphic illness narratives«. Focusing on Brian Fies' *Mom's Cancer* (2006) and Roz Chast's *Can't we talk about something more pleasant* (2014), Rüggemeier analyses how these two comics represent the discrepancy between expectations and corresponding confrontations with reality, paying particular attention to the phenomenon of the ›list‹.

In »Scheitern als strukturierendes Prinzip«, academic researcher at the University of Mannheim, **Daniela Kuschel**, demonstrates how failure is a structuring motif in the comic

Die Kunst zu fliegen (2012) by Spanish author Antonio Altarria and artist Kim. By making the main-protagonist's suicide a central, structuring element of the comic, the aviator character's take-offs and landings take on an allegorical meaning of flying high and crash landings.

As part of the open section to CLOSURE, **Peter Vignold**, research associate at the Institute of Media and Science of the Ruhr-University of Bochum, discusses the dawn of a ›Golden Age‹ of comic-films. In »You can't save the world alone«, Vignold describes the current phenomenon of the comic-book movie blockbuster.

Another contribution to the open section is, »The ›affected scholar‹: Reading Raina Telgemeier's *Ghosts* (2016) as a Disability Scholar and Cystic Fibrosis Patient«. **Dorothee Schneider**, research associate at the Kiel University, combines personal insight with comics analysis. From a Disability Studies perspective, Schneider's discussion of the representation and function of the chronic illness in the comic, *Ghosts*, posits that the inclusion of affected experience can be used to give a valuable, critical, reading.

Sigrid Thomsen, university assistant at the University of Vienna's *Mobile Cultures and Societies* platform for research, also focuses on representations of mental illness in comics. In »Readable Space and Practice« she examines Alison Bechdel's comic *Fun Home* (2006) and Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1995) in relation to their respective depictions and illustrations of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

For our section **Comic/Context**, we asked **Marc-Oliver Frisch** for his take on the shortcomings of current comics criticism. A longstanding critic himself (*Tagesspiegel*, among others), Frisch is unstinting in his critique of critique. Not content to merely point fingers, however, he also shows that better failure is possible on the basis of an unsparing look at one's own critical predilections and misdirections. Although we could only include one critic's opinion, this much-needed opinion piece will not fail to garner replies and further critiques in our upcoming issues.

With the launch of CLOSURE #5 the downloadable contributions have a new layout. Also, the images on our webpage can now be enlarged by clicking on them. We present the artists of our covers in short features, starting with **Kate Carruthers Thomas** (Cover) and **Matthias Latza** (ComicKontext). Furthermore, as part of CLOSURE's efforts to build bridges in the academic research of Comics beyond German-language boundaries, the main pages of our website are translated into English.

We would like to thank the article authors and reviewers who have contributed to CLOSURE #5, and hope you enjoy this new issue.

Kiel, November 2018
Your CLOSURE-Team

CLOSURE
Kieler e-Journal für Comicforschung

Bound to fail.

Living and working conditions in the comics industry

Katharina Brandl and Anne Elizabeth Moore (Basel / Chicago)

Introduction

Comics, particularly independently created books and stories, focus on (even revel in) breaking certain well-recognized taboos. Sexually explicit images, genre-defying narrative themes, or the address of a limited number of social injustices are common (think R. Crumb's constant *HUP*-era complaints about dumb jocks having too much power in society). Yet the taboo that tends to go undiscussed and often unacknowledged—the actually existing taboo—is how the creator came by the skills, time, and money to put out their »taboo-shattering« work. Exploring the taboo subject of the banal economic realities underpinning comics creators' lives is a task this essay can only begin, but the discussion that follows shows clear reasons why the inherently experimental form of comics offers such a limited range of stories. The taboo we focus on seems to be profane, but is nevertheless a tough one to break: to do so we will need to talk about the social, economic, and political conditions under which people can achieve any degree of success in the comics industry. What living and working conditions are possible in the chronically under-funded form? Do gender, race, sexual orientation, child-rearing, or health and disability limit contributors' opportunities in the industry? The title of our article, *Bound to fail*, reflects the degree to which working in comics is tied to precarious conditions for all but a handful of creators. The question we seek to answer: who is bound to fail and who, if anyone, is apt to succeed?

To find out more about the lived realities of people engaged in the comics community, Anne Elizabeth Moore designed a survey in cooperation with *The Ladydrawers of Chicago*, *Illinois* and *Femicomix Finland* at Villa Salin (FI) in November 2014. Between November 2014 and April 2015, the survey was translated from English to Finnish, German, Latvian, Spanish and Italian; and has since been translated into Swedish. In 2015

and 2016, the survey was distributed internationally; and in July 2016, with the support of Kone Foundation (FI), the data was analyzed and narrated in more than 50 pages of comics that were produced by an international consortium of comics makers and researchers at Saari residency in Finland (Katharina Brandl, My Eklund, Saskia Gullstrand, Laura Keninš, Verna Kuutti, Hanna-Pirita Lehkonen, Sheika Lugtu, Anne Elizabeth Moore, Ylva Oknelid, Johanna »Roju« Rojola, Elke R. Steiner, Fran Syass). Presenting the findings of the survey in comics form was a project aimed at ensuring that the results of the survey were understood by, and interpreted through, the creators whose lives we aimed to describe. Working in this way also sought to make the results of the research immediately accessible to those who are directly affected by the precariat of working and living in the comics industry, rather than primarily to a scientific community researching comics. To date, only a handful of the comics (and therefore also the results of the survey) have been published, for example the data set on censorship in comics in September 2016 by PEN America (Moore/Lugtu/Steiner/Syass). Alongside our paper, we chose to include three comics to accompany the research: (1) *The Joy of Creation* (Brandl/Kuutti/Kenins), which displays and narrates the results of the survey regarding the economic conditions of self-publishers, (2) *Cahiér de Doléances* (Brandl/Steiner/Kuutti) that examines our survey methodology and our theoretical approach, and (3) *Under the Table* (Kuutti/Roju/Lugtu), a comic about sexual harassment in the comics industry. All of the comics were produced during the joint stay at Saari residency in Finland in 2016, and emerged from the findings of the survey created by Moore. In the essay that follows, to be read alongside these comics, we will (1) present the theoretical framework of the survey to (2) discuss the survey design in detail, and will (3) present key findings on the economic situation of our respondents.

Embracing involvement and subjectivity: Our theoretical framework

Experts from the social sciences may spot a resemblance between our international comics survey and Karl Marx' seminal questionnaire *Fragebogen für Arbeiter* (1880), as well as a strong deviation from conventional survey designs. In the late 19th Century, Karl Marx designed a survey for workers comprising 100 questions that was published by the journal *La Revue Socialiste*, and an additional 25.000 copies were distributed via workers' associations (Marx, 230-237). Marx' survey consists of questions that are easily answerable—such as an individual's total working hours—but it also included questions that required lengthy answers, like details of previous strikes in the factory, of safety standards, or of union organization. The rate of return of the questionnaires was humble, and there is no record of the data having been analyzed (Knittler, 77).

Arguably, collecting data to objectivize workers' lives may not have been the goal of Marx' endeavor anyway: the survey was meant to be a political tool as well as a research tool—at least that is how his method was later understood by those who utilized it. Marx' *Fragebogen für Arbeiter* can be considered to be the template and first example of so-called *militant research* (e.g. FelS, Knittler, Malo de Molina, Russell). Or, in Sam Halvorsen's words: »The starting point for militant research is not an academic researcher seeking to further a particular strand of knowledge, but the context of political struggle« (Halvorsen, 467). *Militant research* does not refer to militancy in the sense of its German or English translations, but is better understood through the French meaning of the word, which lacks connotations of warfare. »Militant« is rather used to disclose the subjective, or activist (*militant*) involvement of the researchers and the distinction from conventional ideas of objectivity. We can draw a conceptual difference between two poles: conventional research with its *telos* of producing objective knowledge on one hand, and militant research that takes a political stance on the other. It is important to note that militant research always discloses its approach—it does not mask a specific, activist research interest behind the authority of conventional survey design; rather, it explicitly highlights the activist involvement and interest of the researchers. Militant research, to put it bluntly, is the intersection of academia and political change. That is, conventional survey design presumes a strict divide between question and answer, and between subject and field of interest: knowledge is derived from previous experience, with no capacity intact to account for change. Militant research presumes change as a constant, and that survey questions stand among the many forces that can influence it.

That work toward political change tends to be understood as ›activism‹ calls to mind the work of Brazilian philosopher Paolo Freire, who in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* draws a distinction between »activism« and »verbalism«, and finds both lacking in terms of on-the-ground political effectiveness. Defining activism as »sacrifice of reflection« and verbalism as its opposite, »sacrifice of action«, Freire forwards instead a notion of praxis, where action and reflection are combined, further described by the equation »word = work« (Freire, 75). While these definitions do not reflect the popular usage of the term »activist«—or rather, reflect it only by accident—they figure strongly in Moore's conception of the survey and reflect a notion of political agency rooted in the Global South that deserves consideration in a project that crosses international borders. Indeed, Freire's description of praxis as »word = work« directly reflects the intention of the international comics survey.

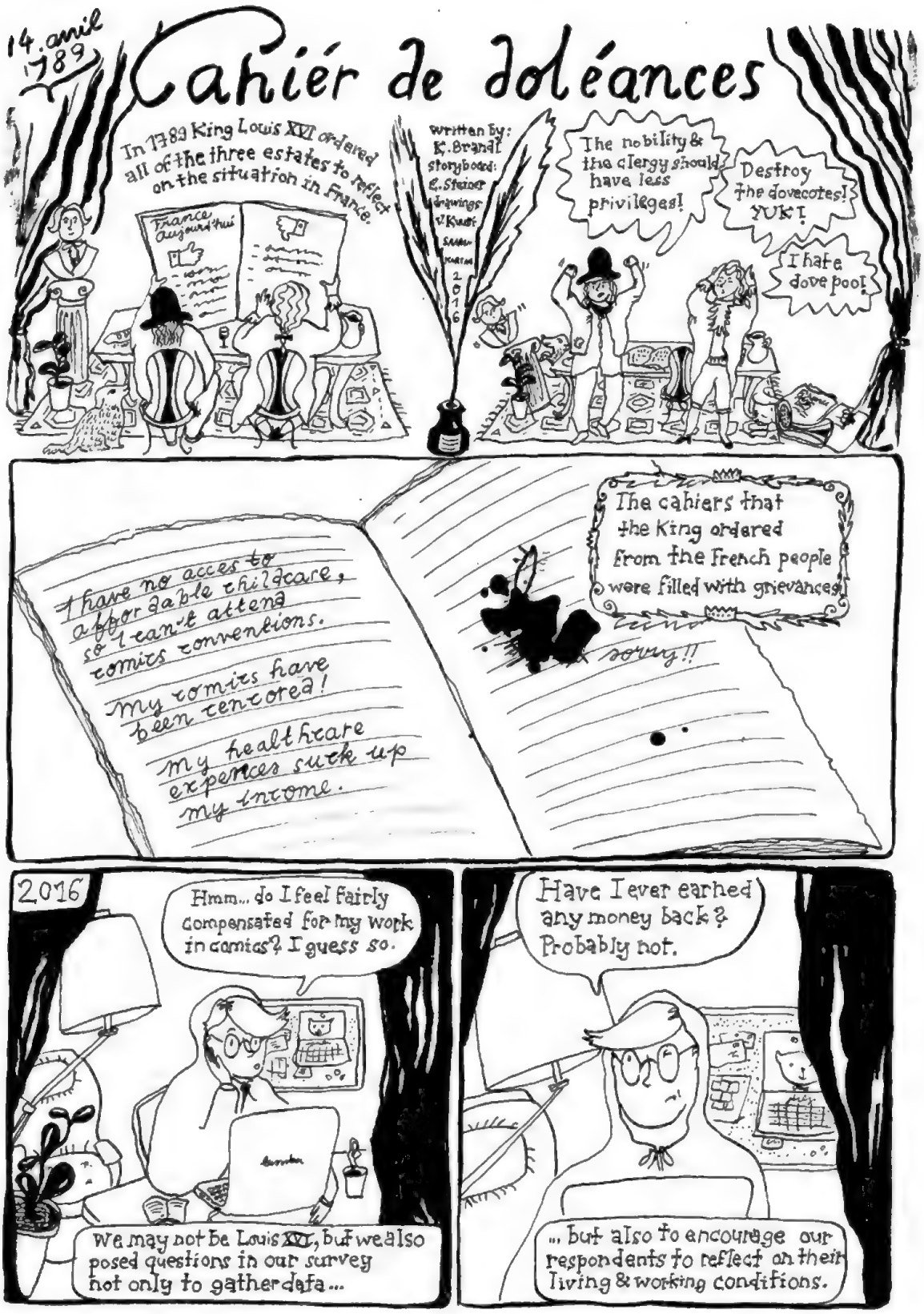
14. avril 1789
Cahiér de doléances
In 1789 King Louis XVI ordered all of the three estates to reflect on the situation in France.
France Aujourd'hui
written by: K. Brandl
storyboard: C. Steiner
drawings: V. Kuutti
2016
The nobility & the clergy should have less privileges!
Destroy the dovecotes! YUK!
I hate dove poo!
I have no acces to affordable childcare, so I can't attend comics conventions.
My comics have been censored!
My healthcare expences suck up my income.
The cahiers that the King ordered from the French people were filled with grievances.
sorry!!
2016
Hmm... do I feel fairly compensated for my work in comics? I guess so.
We may not be Louis XVI, but we also posed questions in our survey not only to gather data...
Have I ever earned any money back? Probably not.
... but also to encourage our respondents to reflect on their living & working conditions.

Fig. 1: *Cahiér de Doléances* (Brandl/Steiner/Kuutti).

Considering only the hours I have worked in and the money I have put into the comics community, how fairly do I feel I've been compensated from my time and investment? On a scale from 0-5?
Well that's probably a 1.
So, they asked me what the ideal publishing environment for my comics would be.
And what did you reply?
A blog where we could publish and where readers could donate once or periodically.
We could totally set that up ourselves in our region!
Maybe some of our respondents even thought about ways to change their situation.
Oh please! Your PC shit is OBNOXIUS!
Why the hell are you pretending to gather data with all of these unnecessary questions?!
For other respondents, our approach did not work that well.

Fig. 2: *Cahiér de Doléances* (Brandl/Steiner/Kuutti).

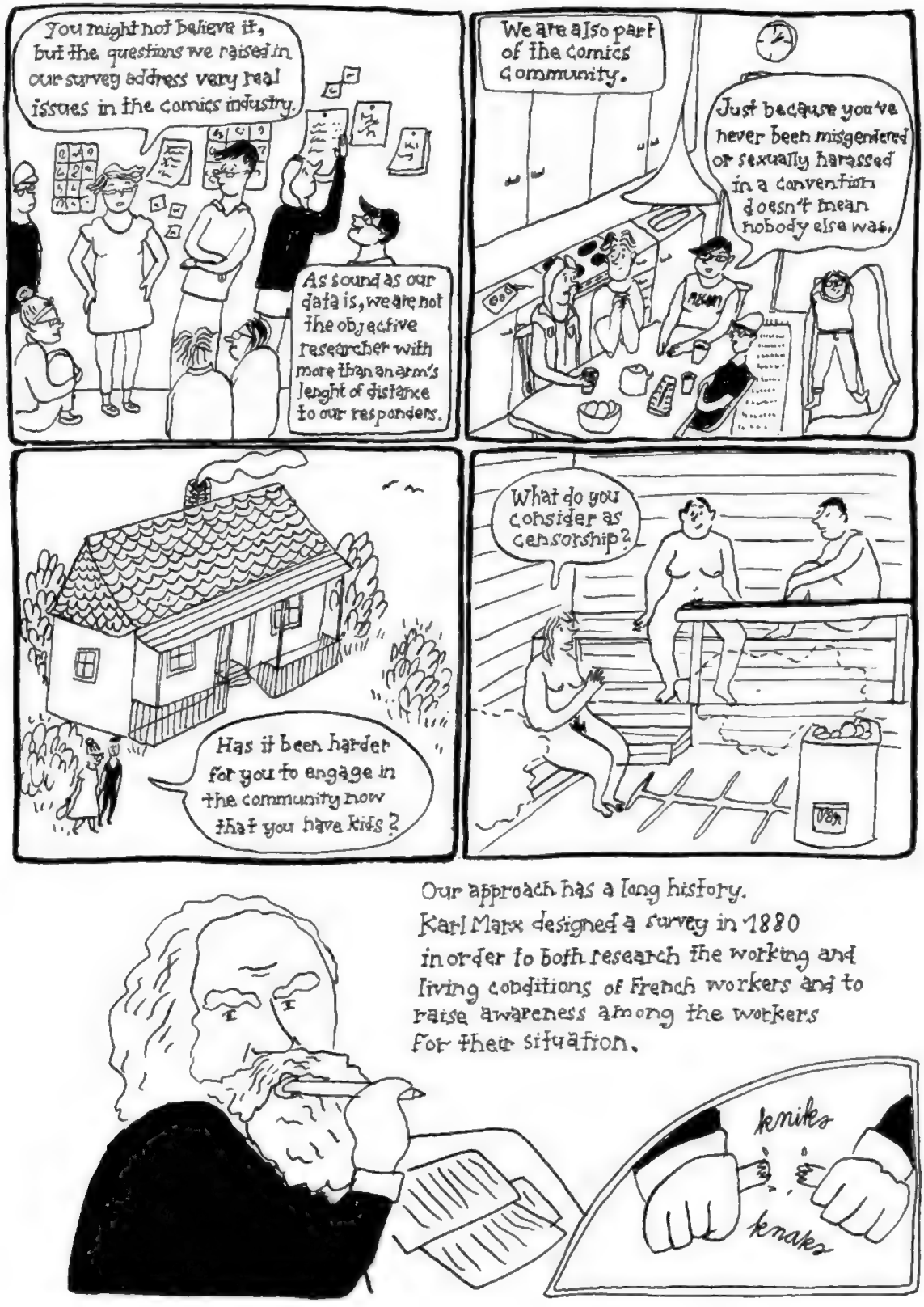
You might not believe it, but the questions we raised in our survey address very real issues in the comics industry.
As sound as our data is, we are not the objective researcher with more than an arm's lenght of distance to our responders.
We are also part of the comics community.
Just because you've never been misgendered or sexually harassed in a convention doesn't mean nobody else was.
Has it been harder for you to engage in the community now that you have kids?
What do you consider as censorship?
Our approach has a long history.
Karl Marx designed a survey in 1880 in order to both research the working and living conditions of French workers and to raise awareness among the workers for their situation.
knikes
knakes

Fig. 3: *Cahiér de Doléances* (Brandl/Steiner/Kuutti).

Industrial sociology!
The concept of using surveys as a political tool and a method to gather data was adopted by industrial sociologists in the 50's in the US and by Neo-Marxist movements in the 50's & 60's in Italy and in France.
OPERAISMO
Socialism ou BARBARIE!
Job center
There it was named "militant research" or "conricerca".
PRECARIOSA A LA DERIVA
TEAMCOLOR$
COLECTIVO SITUACIONES
EDU FACTORY
Today, militant research pops up all over the place: Because not only describing precarious working and living conditions is essential, but also changing them.
EX ARGENTINA
TAISTELEVA TUTKIMUS

Fig. 4: *Cahiér de Doléances* (Brandl/Steiner/Kuutti).

Mituntersuchung

Due to the misunderstandings engendered by the term *militant research* in both English and German, we propose to use two terms that were coined in the activist adaptations of Marx' concept from the 1950s to the 1970s: *con-ricerca* (co-research, in German often translated as *Mituntersuchung*) and *témoinage* (testimony, witness report). *Témoinage* was used by the French group *Socialism ou Barbarie* in the 1950s, whose most famous proponents were Claude Lefort — better-known, later, for this contribution to political theory, especially theory of democracy and totalitarianism—and Cornelius Castoriadis, to describe reports from workers about their working conditions and their life outside the factory in order to find potential points for revolutionary intervention. The group did not use surveys like Marx' to trigger the reports, but suggested specific topics in order to trigger narrative reports from workers. Workers were considered as experts for their situation and their experience; the »proletarian experience« was deemed to be at the core of political action (Lefort).

Con-ricerca was coined by the Italian *operaists* (a neo-marxist group in Northern Italy of the 1960s) and the group around the journal *Quaderni Rossi* for their research in and with the mass protests surrounding the automotive industries in the north of Italy in the 1960s. What brings *Socialism ou Barbarie* and the Italian operaists together is their theoretical conviction that their contemporary communist parties understood the relationship between the working class and economics in an all-too mechanistic way (Panzieri). Class struggle is bound to the specific experiences of the individuals that make up the proletariat, so their counter-argument went, and a class does not only come about due to economic conditions, or its mechanistic role in the Marxist model of society, but also due to their everyday experiences. Economic conditions cannot be revolutionary, only people can be—to paraphrase Claude Lefort (7). *Socialism ou Barbarie* and *Quaderni Rossi* are important historical anchors for anyone interested in co-research and their work has been referred to frequently in recent years. To give some cursory examples that were strongly discussed in the German-speaking area: the group FelS (Für eine linke Strömung) did a co-research project at Jobcenter (the public employment service) Neukölln in Berlin from 2010-2013, artists Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann introduced the concept of co-research to the art field with their project *ExArgentina* at the beginning of the 2000s and *precarias a la deriva* worked with feminist self-research in the same timeframe (FelS, Creischer, Precarias a la deriva). Nevertheless, it should not go unnoticed that feminist research projects, as early as Käthe Leichter's work in the 1930s on women's living and working conditions in Vienna, adopted the method, as did feminist self-research groups beginning in the 1960s (Knittler, 76). In the US, Florence Kelley, an early translator of Marx's works into English, developed a similar survey methodology with the aim of correcting the conditions of women's rights and limiting child labor in the 1890s while at Hull House, Jane Addam's and Ellen Gates Starr's settlement house in Chicago.[1]

THE JOY OF CREATION
WRITTEN BY KATHARINA BRANDL AND VERNA KUUTTI
DRAWN BY LAURA ĶENIŅŠ SAARI RESIDENCY 2016
WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT COMICS?
SORRY, I'M REALLY LATE FOR WORK
HI! THIS IS A REALLY AMAZING WORK OF ART! IT'S ABOUT...
SO PAUL WILL HAVE THE REPORT AT 11 AND AT 12...
ZINE
HERE, HAVE A FREE ZINE!
GET OUT OF MY WAY!
I MADE MY FIRST SELF-PUBLISHED ZINE LAST YEAR-56 PAGES, BLACK AND WHITE, COLOUR COVER.
IT TOOK AROUND:
40 HOURS OF PLANNING AND SCRIPTING
60 HOURS OF DRAWING
SCAN
VRRRP
15 HOURS OF SCANNING AND PHOTOSHOP
40 HOURS OF INDESIGN
From "Speedy Print" 16.08.2016 15:28:39
Bleed needs to be 3mm not 2mm
Pls resend
Show 46 more messages in this thread
5 HOURS OF EMAILING WITH THE PRINT SHOP DUDE
ALTOGETHER, AROUND A MONTH OF WORK AT 40 HOURS A WEEK.
I HAVE NOW SOLD 11 COPIES OF MY ZINE!
THAT MAKES €55!
50€
IF I MANAGE TO SELL 3 MORE, I WILL MAKE THE PRINTING COSTS BACK!
ZINE
WITH MY LOUSY MARKETING SKILLS, I'M AMONG THE COMIC CREATORS WHO EARN ONLY A FRACTION OF THEIR INCOME FROM SELF-PUBLISHING.
YEAH, YOU CAN BUY THIS, IT'S NOT THAT GREAT... I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'LL LIKE IT...

Fig. 5: *The Joy of Creation* (Brandl/Kuutti/Kenins).

OUT OF 29 COMIC CREATORS WHO EARNED MONEY FROM SELF-PUBLISHING:
EURO
76% EARNED 1-10% OF THEIR ANNUAL INCOME
3% EARNED 21-30%
7% EARNED 100%
14% EARNED LESS THAN 1%
SO WHERE DO WE GET OUR BREAD AND BUTTER IF NOT FROM OUR ZINES AND BLOGS AND ANTHOLOGIES?
I GET A LITTLE BIT OF STUDENTAID, TEACH COMICS AND ANIMATION AND FREELANCE AS A JOURNALIST. SOMETIMES I DO DJ GIGS!
AND THE REST OF THE TIME I MAKE COMICS!
AND THAT MEANS...SUPER RARELY.
LIKE ME, SOME OF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS HAVE JOBS RELATED TO COMICS.
I DRAW COMICS FOR A MAGAZINE!
I DO ILLUSTRATION!
I DRAW CARICATURES!
BUT MANY DON'T.
I DO OFFICE WORK!
I LIVE ON SOCIAL WELFARE!
I'M A PERSONAL ASSISTANT!

Fig. 6: *The Joy of Creation* (Brandl/Kuutti/Kenins).

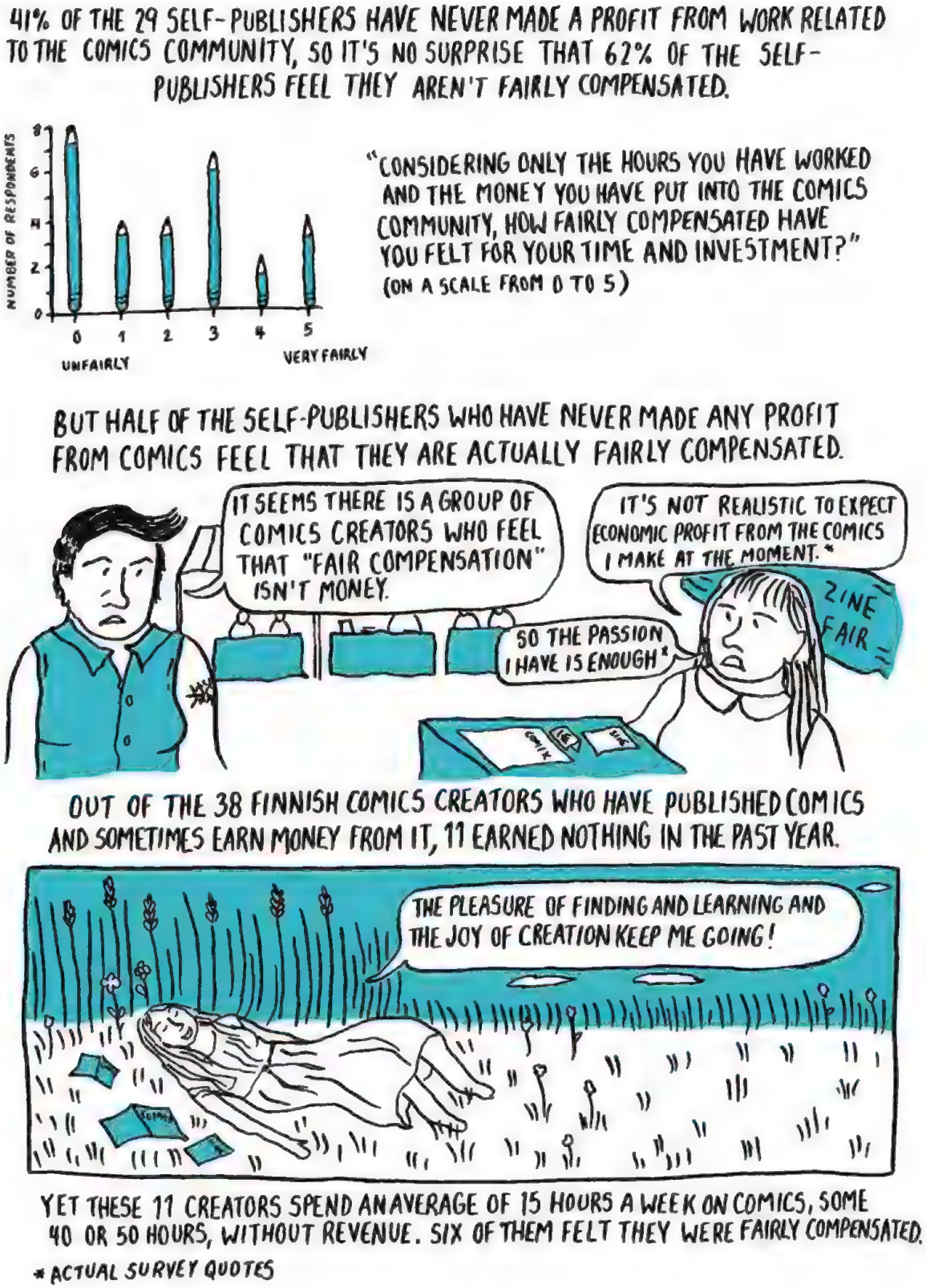
41% OF THE 29 SELF-PUBLISHERS HAVE NEVER MADE A PROFIT FROM WORK RELATED TO THE COMICS COMMUNITY, SO IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT 62% OF THE SELF-PUBLISHERS FEEL THEY AREN'T FAIRLY COMPENSATED.
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
0 1 2 3 4 5
UNFAIRLY
VERY FAIRLY
"CONSIDERING ONLY THE HOURS YOU HAVE WORKED AND THE MONEY YOU HAVE PUT INTO THE COMICS COMMUNITY, HOW FAIRLY COMPENSATED HAVE YOU FELT FOR YOUR TIME AND INVESTMENT?" (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)
BUT HALF OF THE SELF-PUBLISHERS WHO HAVE NEVER MADE ANY PROFIT FROM COMICS FEEL THAT THEY ARE ACTUALLY FAIRLY COMPENSATED.
IT SEEMS THERE IS A GROUP OF COMICS CREATORS WHO FEEL THAT "FAIR COMPENSATION" ISN'T MONEY.
IT'S NOT REALISTIC TO EXPECT ECONOMIC PROFIT FROM THE COMICS I MAKE AT THE MOMENT.*
SO THE PASSION I HAVE IS ENOUGH*
ZINE FAIR
OUT OF THE 38 FINNISH COMICS CREATORS WHO HAVE PUBLISHED COMICS AND SOMETIMES EARN MONEY FROM IT, 11 EARNED NOTHING IN THE PAST YEAR.
THE PLEASURE OF FINDING AND LEARNING AND THE JOY OF CREATION KEEP ME GOING!
YET THESE 11 CREATORS SPEND AN AVERAGE OF 15 HOURS A WEEK ON COMICS, SOME 40 OR 50 HOURS, WITHOUT REVENUE. SIX OF THEM FELT THEY WERE FAIRLY COMPENSATED.
* ACTUAL SURVEY QUOTES

Fig. 7: *The Joy of Creation* (Brandl/Kuutti/Kenins).

DID I FEEL FAIRLY COMPENSATED FROM 160 HOURS OF WORK?
WELL, I DON'T KNOW
I JUST NEEDED TO DO THIS
ZINE
IT WAS LIKE MY BABY!
I GOT MY INCOME ELSEWHERE SO IT WAS KIND OF COOL THAT I DIDN'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT WHETHER MY COMIC WOULD SELL OR NOT
BANKOMAT
ACCOUNT
872.39
AT THE SAME TIME IT MEANT LONG DAYS, WORKING ON MY ZINE AFTER MY DAY JOB. BIGGER CIRCLES UNDER MY EYES.
ZINE
SOUNDS LIKE AN AWFUL LOT OF REPRODUCTIVE WORK TO ME! DOMESTIC WORKERS AND COMIC CREATORS OF THE WORLD UNITE!
NEXT: ARE COMICS A LABOUR OF LOVE?

Fig. 8: *The Joy of Creation* (Brandl/Kuutti/Kenins).

To come back to the main differences between conventional research methods and co-research, Käthe Knittler has summarized three key conceptual discrepancies: (1) the relationship between subject and object/researcher and the researched group(s) or individual(s) is drastically reconfigured, (2) the idea of neutrality or partiality is understood differently, as is (3) the relationship between theory and praxis (Knittler, 77). Firstly in co-research, the researchers are often part of the community that is examined and their knowledge will be acknowledged as expert knowledge. Secondly, co-research serves the surveyed group, it is research designed to contribute knowledge to the community and offer a handle for self-reflection within the community. This also serves as a reason why the results of the international comics survey were primarily published as comics, because of the direct benefit for the community. Thirdly, as the historical examples have shown, co-research stemmed from the idea of critiquing Marxist theory and therefore praxis that was understood as misguided. Data is gathered and knowledge is shared in order to not only learn about living and working conditions, but also to change them, while underscoring the lived experience of workers.[2]

Why, in the context of our international comics survey, gather data to be analyzed quantitatively when for example qualitative close readings of interviews with comics creators could also enlighten us about their social realities and their working conditions? Firstly, we do not know from other quantitative surveys how people in the comics industry work, how much they earn, if self-publishing is a viable option, if their gender identity has a significant effect on their reception as artists, or why they choose to use pen names. So, the lack of data explains the need to get a basic and overarching idea of the conditions of comics production and dissemination, which is achieved by quantitative data. Quantitative data also allows us to draw conclusions based on comparison by having larger sets of data than qualitative approaches. The high amount of open questions thus enables us to analyze some of the answers qualitatively and find patterns of individual reasoning and sense making. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the design of the survey and the formulation of the 125 questions was not designed to be analyzed via elaborate quantitative calculations, but rather to get an overview of the data by reckoning frequencies. And of course, we can identify at least three sources of potential biases (in the distribution of the survey, the language and its length), which are reflected below in their potential effects on the data sets. (Please see a selection of survey questions in Appendix A.)

(1) Distribution of the survey

The survey was distributed online via the networks of the two participating comics collectives (the Chicago-based collective Ladydrawers and Femicomix Finland), each of whom have international reach well beyond their shifting core memberships, as well as translators and researchers involved in the comics community—which, of course, biases the sample in favor of target groups similar to the creators of the study and respondents that have access

to online communication. Nevertheless, with 260 respondents internationally, the survey provides a comprehensive sense of the living and working conditions of people engaged in the comics industry. As a document that also came from known figures in the comics industry to a wide array of creators throughout the US and Europe, it was also more likely to be filled out despite its length. The length of the survey and the kinds of questions it presented engendered a self-selection among participants: respondents who saw some gain from answering questions and having information about the realities (which they share with a wide array of creators around the world) come to light were more likely to complete the survey—in particular, this meant that queer-identified folks, women and creators with disabilities were more likely than anyone else to complete the entire survey. We can see this by analyzing data of incomplete surveys, also captured by our online form; individuals who opted out of completing the entire survey tended to be male, white, heterosexual, and have higher incomes than the average.

(2) The language of the survey

The survey comprised 125 questions, which indicates that the completion of the survey was effortful. It included open questions, questions that were answered on a scale, and multiple choice questions. Especially the open questions allow us to gain qualitative insights into the reality of the respondents. The language was deliberately inclusive and did not disguise a specific political perspective: for example in the socio-demographic data set, participants were asked not what their gender or their sexual orientation *was*, but how they *identified* it, and left space for further comments in case the answer »other« was chosen. The choice of language is important, because phrasings that address a specific group within the sample in their identity and in their language and may annoy another group of within the sample would be avoided in conventional research settings or conventional survey designs.

What does it mean that questions like that would be avoided? According to the »model of information processing in a survey situation« by Strack/Martin, survey participants have four tasks at hand when replying to a question: They have to (1) interpret the question, (2) generate an opinion, (3) format their response, and (4) edit their response. Not hiding a political motivation in the design of specific questions may lead to so-called context-effects on all four levels. When interpreting a question, the respondent draws upon semantic (what does the question, the terminology used etc. mean?) and pragmatic understanding (what do the researchers want to know?)(Porst). To state the obvious: On the level of pragmatic understanding, the respondent may get an idea of the activist research interest that he or she may or may not agree with and may opt out of the survey, or will answer in a biased way. Rolf Porst outlined the »Ten Commandments« of formulating survey questions, and design of the international comics survey deviates from at least two of the commandments of conventional survey design: (1) We could not ensure to avoid specific

context effects in respondents that resulted from not masking our activist interest, and furthermore (2) we did not avoid questions that targeted knowledge/experiences that a bulk of the respondents did not have (i.e. »Have you ever been misgendered, whether in person or online, during the course of your participation in the comics community?«; misgendering is not a phenomenon that most cis respondents are familiar with.) In conventional survey designs, context effects are as commonplace as in militant research, but researchers try to control them, e.g. by doing a pretest that allows them to adequately predict the bias involved (Porst). We did not pretest all possible context effects, because gathering flawless data was not the only intent of the survey. And indeed, there were respondents who complained about the questions being suggestive and oozing of »political correctness« in the open sections of the survey and via e-mail. However, as a trade-off, we were able to gather detailed information on the living and working conditions of comics creators that would perish in conventional survey designs. An individual, for example, who may earlier have identified as nonbinary, might later in the survey, prompted by our use of inclusive language, elaborate on the difficulty of attending a comics convention with gender-specific restrooms. (Since the design of the survey, it has become customary at institutions of higher learning in the US to begin classes by asking students to identify gender identities and preferred pronouns, a practice that was not yet standard at the conception of the survey.) The individuals who openly complained about the »political correctness« of our research remonstrated against both the language and the topics addressed by the survey; similarly, the detail of information we received from an extremely wide array of creators from diverse backgrounds speaks to the success of the occasionally elaborate methodology and language we used.

(3) Length and level of detail

For a survey with 125 questions, online methods of distribution are not ideal, because chances are high that people stop in the middle of the survey. Ideally, the survey would be completed with an interviewer in a face-to-face situation. Not only would that have been impossible to realize, but the survey asks many questions that are of a private nature, like details of care commitments, gender identity, and questions about individual health situation—therefore the anonymity of online communication comes in handy. The survey comprised sets of questions in seven categories: (1) demographics, (2) questions relating to readership, (3) community engagement questions, (4) creatorship questions, (5) questions relating to economics, (6) publishing questions, (7) questions about attitude and visibility. The survey not only addressed comics creators, but also individuals with different roles in the larger comics-creating and -reading community, such as librarians, community organizers, funders, and publishers. It is important to note that this does not, in any way, dilute these findings as comics-specific: individuals were asked to distinguish between projects

funded by comics creation from other work, a distinction they would be the best to judge anyway. Additionally this solves some key problems in the identification of someone as a »comics creator« or not, since anecdotal evidence and our experience indicates that women, nonbinary people, and folks of color tend to adopt the label »comics creator« later and less frequently than some. Finally, someone who reads comics often also draws them, or used to draw them, or will eventually draw them, and the term »comics community« is intended to incorporate their work in all fields related to comics as well. Entire sections depended on the respondent's role in the industry: librarians for example could skip the set about creatorship. Not all of the questions applied to each respondent, although comics creators were addressed by most of the 125 questions.

(4) Presuppositions

Some (political) assumptions lead the research design and are informed by personal experience, because—as stated above—the researchers are in fact part of the researched community: (1) most of the work in the comics community is not fairly compensated through monetary means (i.e. an income that comes even close to a living wage), (2) data and knowledge about the living and working conditions of comics workers engenders visibility and is the primary step to changing them, and (3) some are more likely than others to make a living with comics or sustain themselves while producing comics or contributing to the comics community in other ways.

The survey

(1) Socio-demographic summary

Out of the 260 respondents, 46% used the English version of the survey, 44% the Finnish one, and 10% the German version. 46% marked »Finnish« when asked for their nationality, 22% USA, 9% German, 3% British, 3% Canadian and 2% would not identify their nationality. In addition, there were respondents from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Curaçao, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Scotland, South Korea, Sweden, and Switzerland. Besides nationality, respondents also listed their place of residence and what they consider their homeland. As regards the self-identification of race, participants were less diverse than in terms of nationality: 83% identified as white, 8% as mixed race, 5% would not categorize, 2% described themselves as Asian, 1% as black / African-American / African-European and 1% Latinx. The majority of the respondents were active comics creators (including writers, inkers, pencilers, and colorists). Out of 260 respondents, 164 identified themselves as creators. In the section relating to the participant's role in the comics' industry, multiple non-exclusive answers

were possible, so 218 also claimed to be readers, 192 declared themselves comics fans, 50 were comics event organizers, 53 volunteered at comics events, 33 were booksellers, 35 editors, some (13) were librarians, 44 were teachers—and 65 altogether labeled themselves as »professionals«. 66% of our respondents identified as female, 21% as male, 6% as non-binary and 7% as other.

The distribution of genders among creators and among editors resembles the gender distribution in the overall sample, whereas two key groups for the production of comics (comics funders, or folks who back online comics projects or put up money for new offline projects) and the dissemination of comics (distributors and booksellers) have a significantly higher percentage of men when compared to the overall sample—the former could, of course, be explained speculatively by the gender wage gap and higher discretionary income among men, which makes becoming a funder of comics, or developing the resources to open a low-profit bookstore or distribution outlet, more likely.

The bulk of the respondents (56%) were between 24 and 36 years of age, with dwindling percentages with growing age. We can only speculate about the strong prevalence of young people among the participants, but one reason could be the (online) means of distribution of the survey, which favors people that are familiar with online communications. Another reason could be the precariousness of working in comics: While quite a few of the respondents explained to us that they cross-finance their engagement in the comics community with day jobs, investing a lot of energy into unpaid work is only accessible for those who don't have other unpaid obligations like care work. And frankly, it gets old with age. A *Lady-drawers* survey that was first published in *Bitch Magazine* in 2010 and republished in 2016 by the Finnish comics magazine *Kuti Kuti*, however, further suggests that women and non-binary folks may simply have shorter careers in the field; of a survey of 63 women-identified comics creators, 30% had been in the industry less than five years, and 37% between five and ten years; only 21% had been working in comics for between ten and 25 years and 12% for longer than that (4% had been working for less than a year). That a majority (71%) of women respondents in the field had careers of a decade or under is alarming; that half of the respondents indicated that they received only 25% of annual income from comics, and that 60% indicated they were likely targets of sexual harassment, seems to indicate potential reasons for such limited careers (Moore/Watson, 20).

Another finding indicative of gender-biases for career options in the comics industry was that 85% of our respondents do not have to care for kids at all, including any care provided for minors in the respondent's home (regardless if the respective minors are biological or adopted children, or if care is provided due to an informal agreement). This number can partly be explained by the dominance of a rather young age group in our sample, but again, it needs to be added that precarious working conditions usually do not serve as a strong motivation for starting a family.

UNDER THE TABLE
WRITTEN BY VERNA KUUTTI
DRAWN BY ROJU AND SHEIKA LUGTU
AT 2016 SAARI RESIDENCY
THE HAPPY FINNISH COMICS FAMILY HAS GATHERED TO CELEBRATE THE END OF ANOTHER AMAZING FESTIVAL
YOU SHOULD SEND ME THE LINK TO YOUR BLOG
I JUST LOVE YOUR ZINES
YOU WERE AMAZING ON STAGE
DUDE COMIX
KOMIX
COMIXXX
FROM 38 FINNISH-SPEAKING COMICS CREATORS WHO ANSWERED THE SURVEY, 9 HAD ENCOUNTERED SEXUAL HARASSMENT.
THAT'S 1 OUT OF 4 COMIC CREATORS WHO ARE HARASSED BY ANONYMOUS PEOPLE ONLINE, READERS, PUBLISHERS, EDITORS, AND FROM FELLOW WORKING COMICS CREATORS.
PINCH
CLICK
SNIFF

Fig. 9: *Under the Table* (Kuutti/Roju/Lugtu).

Fig. 10: *Under the Table* (Kuutti/Roju/Lugtu).

7 OUT OF THE 9 ARE WOMEN
AND THEY WERE OF ALL AGES.
ENCOUNTERS IN THE COMICS WORLD ARE ALL TOO COMMON, ONLINE AND IN PERSON.
E-MAIL
INBOX
I'M GOING TO RAPE YOU YOU FEMINIST WHORE!
MEETING THE READER.
MMM...
DO YOU LIKE ORAL SEX?
MEETING THE PUBLISHER.
COMIX
I LOVE YOUR COMICS AND YOUR TITS!
MEETING THE FAN.
I'M SURE YOU'LL LIKE IT
MEETING THE COLLEAGUE.
24% OF FINNISH-SPEAKING COMICS ARTISTS HAVE RECEIVED UNWANTED SEXUAL ADVANCES OR GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT, AND 63% OF THOSE ARE FEMALE REPRESENTING A SPECTRUM OF AGE RANGES

Fig. 11: *Under the Table* (Kuutti/Roju/Lugtu).

(2) Compensation

So, what do we mean to underscore by stressing the precarious working conditions that the comics industry offers to creators? Asked if they feel fairly compensated, 69% (80 of the 116 respondents who chose to reply) said no, while only 31% answered with yes.[3] The phrasing »fairly compensated« is deliberately vague, so that also non-monetary compensation can be included, which for those that see their contribution to the comics industry as a so-called labor of love, (meaning, a community service or unpaid hobby) might be important. Furthermore, it does not bind labor and monetary compensation together conceptually: labor stays labor even if you are not (fairly) compensated for it. To focus in on the issue of financial compensation, we asked if creators had ever earned back more money from work in the comics community than they have put into it: 58% of the participants never made a profit with their comics work. Interestingly, more than half of the people who checked »yes« when asked if they feel fairly compensated never earned money back from their endeavors in the comics industry—which may lead us to wonder if labor does not have to be financially compensated in the comics industry in order for a creator to feel fairly compensated.

To zoom in even more, we asked respondents to describe how well compensated they felt when only considering the hours and the money they have put into the comics community on a scale from 1 to 10. The results were shocking: the average rating was 1.87 (0 being the worst, 10 being the best). The participants who replied that they feel fairly compensated showed an average of 3.05—so money does not seem to be the means of compensation for comics labor. Additionally, in an open section we asked the participants to briefly describe the non-financial benefits they received from comics that sustain their engagement. 115 respondents gave us insights into their non-financial motivation for their commitment to the comics industry. Reviewing the replies, the prevalence of explanations referring to the comics community is striking. Engagement in the comics industry, it seems to be the case, is strongly compensated by strengthened social networks. Here are some examples of answers we received: »Community. You make a lot of friends and contacts. Fun. Beats working for a living«, one respondent said. Another declared: »The medium of comics allows me to integrate all of my skill sets, and it's always challenging. My peer comics creators are all smart, funny, and kind, and I'm very happy to have them as colleagues.« »I love the medium and will always find it inspiring. My comics career has brought me into a community that I value and helped develop my artistic, writing, and business skills in ways that directly benefit my illustration career. I love reading comics and learning about comics and that's a major passion for me.«

The motivation to tell one's story/stories or to shed light on the stories that matter to the creators was also a strong motive for many of our respondents:

> I love storytelling. I don't quantify my gain on economic terms because if I count the amount of time, materials and energy put in its never equal to the returns I make. My professional career is in design and architecture too—so comics for me is not my source of income. I use it as a therapy and place to discuss my own concerns and an explorative space. It's lovely to be able to share this with other likeminded people.

Some also put their unpaid work in comics into perspective: »I enjoy making them, but I may have to quit if I continue to make only $3-4 an hour in this profession.« Another recurring explanation for why compensation remained low was a framing of unpaid labor as an investment in a creator's future: You might start out not getting paid, but you will eventually earn money with comics, goes the line of thought. Unfortunately, our data does not prove that this is always true.

In stark contrast to the emphasis on social contacts and community bonds as occasionally more significant than financial compensation is the data on harassment in the comics industry we could analyze: 27% replied that they have been target of unwanted sexual advances, whether in person or online, during the course of their participation in the comics community. Only 1,7% of the respondents that replied »yes« to the question identified as male. 17% have been asked to address sexual topics or sexual issues that were not raised in their work (whether in person or online), 29% have experienced sexual or gender-based harassment (in person or online) in the comics community, and 54% affirmed that they have witnessed discrimination toward others during the course of their participation in the community.

Our data connects seemingly incongruent dots into a baffling picture: while the importance of a strong and vibrant community is stressed as a strong motivation to be part of the comics industry, the community seems to be not as respectful and righteous as initially expected. »Do what you love and love what you do!«, stated one of our respondents to explain the drive behind her commitment to comics, and we might add a word of caution: for some this mantra of our times might come true, but a great many who »love« this work do not receive compensation for their labor that allows it to be sustainable or sometimes even possible, and as an encore they may be harassed during a commitment made out of »love«.

Some numbers from an earlier US data collection may be helpful here. In 2012, as part of *The Ladydrawers Comics Collective*'s ongoing research into barriers in comics publishing, Moore devised a survey to poll creators—even people who wouldn't have called themselves *comics* creators, since a lot of artists who combine text and image find the label to be gendered. We found that, of the folks we polled, only 54% identified as male, while 39% identified as female, and 7% identified as nonbinary, genderqueer, or other.

It gets slightly more interesting when we look at how respondents indicated their work came to be published: equal rates of women and men—slightly over 50% of each—submitted work to publishers that year, while only 37% of nonbinary creators did the same. Yet even more than that percentage of males—75%—said they'd been published, while female and nonbinary creators were published at precisely the same rates as they had submitted work (slightly over 50% for women and 37% for nonbinary folk).

What does that mean? It means that, in comics, at least in the US, the primary reason more men are published than anyone else is because work by men is being sought out by

editors and publishers—solicited, and not submitted. Male creators, therefore, are provably given opportunities in comics that women and nonbinary people aren't, and this adds up fast in financial terms. Of those who earned incomes from making comics in 2012, 92% of the creators who earned incomes over the poverty line were male, and only 8% were female, while no single nonbinary creator that we collected data from earned more than $600 per year from comics. Putting these findings into more immediately graspable terms, for every dollar a man earns in comics, a woman earns twenty-seven cents, and a nonbinary creator earns three and a half cents.[4]

(3) Sexual Orientation

As 48% of the sample identified as non-straight, we could gather sufficient data to analyze a data set on financial discrimination in the comics industry and its correlation with sexual orientation. To be specific, given the option to select multiple identities as well as write in their own terms, 45% of the non-straight respondents identified as queer, 18% as bisexual, 11% as asexual, 9% as gay, 8% would not categorize, 6% as omni- or pansexual, 2% as straight with tendencies and 1% as lesbian. Overall, and needless to say, some of the difficulties that the non-straight respondents faced in the comics community affect the community as a whole (e.g. the overall challenging economic situation). However, only 6 of the non-straight respondents earned the bulk of their income from their work in comics, and the most important source of income among this group were various forms of social aid (19%). Of the 94 non-straight respondents who make comics regularly, 47% earned no money from comics last year, contrasted with 8,5% who earned € 10.000,00 or more. So, it seems to be more difficult to »make it« as a queer comics creator. Additionally, only 45% of the non-straight respondents felt that their (published) work was well supported by the comics community, which is, compared to the overall sample (63%), significantly less. 65% of non-straight respondents claim to have witnessed discrimination, while only 54% of the overall sample did. The numbers on harassment are even higher: 37% of non-straight comic artists encountered harassment, compared to only 19% of all respondents. To come to the point: Person A, a creator who identified as non-binary and queer, named an example: »At Comicinvasion we had a table with two trans-persons and one femme. Visitors were first interested in our comics and then put them aside in an embarrassed way. We, the two trans-persons, were partly stared at. And misgendered. [...] I am being misgendered all the time, that's why I make comics«. Person B, a creator who identified as male, white, and straight from Switzerland claimed: »In my experience, the comics scene is very open and there is no discrimination.« He mentions that his work has never been accepted for publication due to any other reasons other than the quality of his work. Yet when asked the control question, he adds that »maybe due to networks« he has been invited to participate in publications and/or events.

Bound to fail?

Many of the precarious working conditions for comics creators are endemic to the hybrid and underappreciated nature of the medium. Narrative sequential art, presented in the traditional published format we think of as comics, is only about 100 years old, and is often read as a visual form of literature, a static version of film, or somehow like painting but longer. Comics, in other words, tend only rarely to be examined as a mature form of art in their own right, and so remain understudied, underfunded, and underrepresented on gallery walls or in bookstores. This, in turn, has kept the comics publishing industry somewhat small, even as superhero characters gain worldwide attention in films and serial programs. Even today, relatively few schools exist that provide training in the medium itself, few museums stand to collect and display original works, and few critics are focused on describing, historicizing, and positioning the form as a vital, compelling practice.

Yet these tenets do not explain why certain creators seem to excel in the field—most of whom tend to share gender, sexual, and racial identities—while others struggle. In fact, a relatively low-stakes field like comics, where few boundaries for success are preordained, could conceivably be *easier* to navigate for folks who tend to exist outside of white, heteronormative, able-bodied society. Somehow, however, comics seem to entrench instead of repudiate a very traditional mainstream creatorship—speaking of the comics industry as a field with equal opportunities would be perverse.

Put another way, the comics industry duplicates, and even bolsters, key barriers to longevity, sustainability, and success for certain creators. Needless to add, anyone who wants to enjoy diverse comics or praises comics for their taboo-breaking contents or for their potential to give voice to a manifold array of identities, needs to reflect on the fact that the comics industry's structure is hardly fertile soil to grow the work of truly diverse subjects. To a great degree, the success of an individual in the world of comics can be determined not by the merit of their work, but by their ability to pass as, or their willingness to be pursued by, a heterosexual, white, able-bodied, cismale raising no children in the home. Everyone else seems bound to fail—or perhaps put more correctly, the comics community seems intent on failing everyone else.

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1] See her digitized archives in the Harvard University Library Open Collections Program: <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/kelley.html>. Accessed 05 April 2018.

2] Here are some examples of survey questions being a trigger for self-reflection: After being asked about the financial and non-financial compensation for their work in the comics industry, questions 64-72 name other factors with effects on income like child-rearing, healthcare costs. E.g. (67) What percentage of your income do you estimate you spent on childcare in the last year? (68) What percentage of your income do you estimate you spent on healthcare in the last year? (69) If you regularly require childcare, do you have access to quality, reliable, early childhood education, given your income and the resources offered you by the state? (70) Do you have access to quality, reliable healthcare, given your income and the resources offered you by the state? (71) Has your participation in the comics industry lessened due to health or family factors, including deciding to raise children, chronic illness or injury (your own and others'), or other factors? (72) Has your participation in childrearing or ability to care for your (or others') health needs lessened due to your work in the comics community?

3] Generally, the German speaking respondents were sensitive to being asked about money, actually those who do not earn money with comics at all, stopped answering any of the following questions.

4] Kuti Kuti: <https://kutikutisf.wordpress.com/2016/05/23/kuti-40/>. Accessed 10 July 2018.

CLOSURE
Kieler e-Journal für Comicforschung

Aus dem Rahmen fallen/in den Rahmen fallen

Scheiternde Künstler im Comic um 1900

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Hinführung

Es besteht Konsens darüber, dass die Autor_innen früher Comics eine Vielzahl von Ideen aus den Karikaturen und graphischen Narrationen des 19. Jahrhunderts entlehnen. Wenn Patricia Mainardi betont, »visual conventions invented by early comic strip artists, still in use today, created a language parallel to, but distinct from, that of painting, illustration, and even caricature« (Mainardi), dann geschah diese Entwicklung vor dem Hintergrund und auf der Basis der Vorgänger aus Malerei, Illustration und Karikatur. Erzählweisen, Figurentypen, Themen, selbst einzelne Gags, werden von den Vorgängern übernommen und tradiert. Sie unterlaufen bei der Übernahme aus Einzelbildwerken wie Illustrationen oder Karikaturen in die sequentielle graphische Narration jedoch Transformationen, die einerseits in historischen Veränderungen begründet sind, andererseits in medienspezifischen Erfordernissen.[1] Ein naheliegender Grund für die Tradierung von überkommenen Ideen im Comic liegt darin, dass zumindest einige Zeichner_innen Wurzeln in Europa haben. Bekanntlich entstammen die Brüder Rudolph Dirks (*The Katzenjammer Kids*) und Gus Dirks (*Bugville*) einer Familie aus Schleswig-Holstein, die im späten 19. Jahrhundert in die USA emigriert (vgl. Braun; Eckhorst). Ein anderes Beispiel ist der Gründer und Herausgeber der zunächst auf Deutsch erscheinenden illustrierten Humorzeitschrift *Puck*, der erfolgreichsten ihrer Art im letzten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts: Joseph Ferdinand Keppler wird in Wien geboren und arbeitet in der dort besonders lebhaften Branche illustrierter Satirezeitschriften, bevor er in die USA auswandert (die Geschichte der Comics kann insofern auch als eine Geschichte der Migration erzählt werden). Als sich die Zeitungsverleger William Randolph Hearst und Joseph Pulitzer in den letzten Jahren dieses Jahrhunderts für graphische Narrationen zu interessieren beginnen, finden sie ihre Zeichner in den Satirezeitschriften, darunter u. a. Frederick Burr Opper, Franklin M. Howarth, Henry ›Hy‹ Mayer und der Schweizer Immigrant Eugene ›Zim‹ Zimmerman. Sie zeichnen für die Magazine Bildergeschichten europäischer Prägung – u. a. in der Nachfolge von Rodolphe Töpffer und Wil-

helm Busch – bevor sie zur Tagespresse wechseln. Zudem waren europäische Satirezeitschriften in den Großstädten der Ostküste verfügbar und man war keineswegs durch den Atlantik von Europa abgeschnitten (vgl. Parton, 239). Im Gegenteil, zuweilen wurden Geschichten europäischer Autor_innen nachgedruckt oder nachgestochen. Beispiele für diesen direkten transatlantischen Austausch gibt es zahlreiche (vgl. bspw. Bachmann 2017, 217f., 240; Bachmann [2018]).

Obschon diese Beziehungen bekannt sind, ist ihre Erforschung bislang hauptsächlich in groß angelegten, den Tatbestand in groben Zügen darstellenden Studien erfolgt (vgl. Kunzle; Smolderen), allen voran durch David Kunzle. Aufgrund der beeindruckenden Reichweite solcher Gesamtdarstellungen lassen sie sich kaum mit Einzelanalysen graphischer Narrationen in Einklang bringen, sodass zwar bemerkenswerte allgemeine Beobachtungen formuliert werden, Details aber außen vor bleiben müssen. Thierry Smolderen weist beispielhaft völlig zurecht auf die zentrale Rolle von Karikaturisten in der satirischen Presse des 19. Jahrhunderts hin und gibt dafür diverse Beispiele, kann aber kaum in nennenswerten Umfang auf Einzelheiten eingehen. Eine solche Detailarbeit steht im Fokus der vorliegenden Studie. Anhand zahlreicher Beispiele wird im Folgenden der scheiternde Künstler in den Blick genommen.[2] Diese Beispiele sind bewusst als »Szenen« überschrieben. Ihre Darstellung in diesem Beitrag ist als Florilegium zu verstehen, das die Vielfalt der Darstellung von scheiternden Künstlern im frühen Comic in den Blick nimmt, ohne daraus schon Kategorien abzuleiten oder als operationalisierbares Analyseinstrument fungieren zu wollen. Die einzelnen Szenen sind folglich weder trennscharf noch erschöpfend. Um Kategorien zu begründen, die mehr als nur wenige Fälle beschreiben, ist die Zahl der Beispiele zu gering, hierzu sind nicht zuletzt weitreichendere Archivrecherchen erforderlich, die in diesem Zusammenhang nicht geleistet werden kann. Die vorliegende synchrone Sondierung ist thematologisch angelegt. Sie versucht in erster Linie Gegenstände auszumachen und zu beschreiben, die in frühen – d. h. zwischen den 1890er und 1920er Jahren erschienenen – Comics thematisiert werden – und zwar gleichermaßen auf graphischer wie auf sprachlicher Ebene. In einer diachronen Suchbewegung müssen in der Folge weitere Sondierungen vorgenommen und mit den hier dargestellten Beispielen verglichen werden, um Aussagen über die historischen und medienspezifischen Veränderungen bei der Thematisierung von scheiternden Künstlern machen zu können. Anna Grosskopf hat in Ihrer Dissertation Inszenierungen von Künstlern in der Karikatur (und vereinzelt auch der Bildergeschichte) seit dem 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Niedergang der auflagenstarken Satiremagazine, in denen Kunstkarikaturen zum regelmäßigen Programm gehörten, analysiert. Sie macht sichtbar, »dass die Karikatur sich nicht nur […] mit der Kunst ihrer Zeit auseinandersetzte, sondern auch deren technische Aspekte, die Arbeit des Künstlers, intensiv hinterfragte« (Grosskopf, 449). Dabei attestiert sie der Karikatur eine »vordergründige Leichtigkeit ihres Witzes«, die jedoch eine tiefe »Vertrautheit mit der Kunsttheorie und den zeitgenössischen Kunstdebatten« offenbart (ebd.). Anhand eines umfangreichen Korpus arbeitet sie eine Reihe von Topoi heraus, die in der Kunst- und Künstlerkarikatur vermehrt aufgegriffen werden, dazu zählen hohe Malgeschwindigkeit (als Kritik an

Impressionismus und anderen modernistischen Strömungen), Kunst als maschinelle Produktion, leere/schwarze Leinwände und andere mehr. Grosskopfs Arbeit wird hier als Bezugspunkt für die Betrachtung amerikanischer Comics herangezogen.

Scheiternde Künstler_innen

Scheiternde Künstler_innen und ihre mediale Repräsentation haben eine Tradition, die bis in die Antike zurückreicht, man denke nur an Arachne (Ovid, 264–273) oder den Künstlerwettstreit zwischen Zeuxis von Herakleia und Parrhasios (Plinius, 133). Dass in Griechenland Wettbewerbe der Malerei ausgetragen werden wie sie Plinius schildert, zeigt, dass Kunst als vergleichbar und bewertbar wahrgenommen wurde, als gleichsam sportliche Disziplin, die man gewinnen, in der man aber auch scheitern kann. Meist sind die Gründe für das Scheitern der Künstler_innen jedoch profaner. Nicht selten erscheinen Künstler_innen beispielweise als Stümper, die handwerklich nichts zu leisten vermögen, oder als Ignoranten, die entweder überkommenen Ästhetiken nachhängen, oder nach Modernisierung streben. Die zumindest implizite Kritik, die in der Darstellung scheiternder Künstler_innen zum Ausdruck kommt, zielt historisch auf ganz unterschiedliche Aspekte des Künstler_innendaseins und lässt sich nicht pauschalisieren. Daneben spielt das Scheitern der Kunst an sich, der Zweifel an dem, was Kunst überhaupt leisten könne, eine Rolle, eine Problematik, die sich im 19. Jahrhundert in der bildenden Kunst und um 1900 auch in der Literatur artikuliert. Mit Blick auf das breite Spektrum eines misslingenden Kunstwerks, versagender Künstler_innen oder einer in Zweifel gezogenen Kunst wird ›Scheitern‹ im Folgenden weit ausgelegt.

Scheitern im Comic

Jared Gardners Kurzbeschreibung von Bud Fishers *Happy Hooligan* wirft ein interessantes Licht auf die frühen Comics:

> [The strip] told essentially the same story, with minor variations along the way. Each week, Happy—a tramp with a generous heart and a tin can for a hat—would head out hoping to do the right thing; and each week he would end up beaten, evicted, or arrested, mistaken for the ›hooligan‹ his appearance and his name suggested. And the following Sunday, Happy would set out, ready to do it all again (Gardner, 242).

Sehr ähnlich könnten auch die Beschreibungen von zahlreichen anderen Comicstrips lauten. Das trifft besonders auf Screwball-Comics wie *Happy Hooligan* zu, aber auch auf Lausbuben-Strips wie die *Katzenjammer Kids*, die am Ende der meisten Episoden eine Prügelstrafe für ihre Spitzbübereien erhalten. Selbst Little Nemos wöchentlich variierter Sturz aus

dem Bett, Sammy Sneezes Unvermögen, seine Niesanfälle zu kontrollieren, Mutt und Jeffs Missgeschicke und selbst Krazys unerfüllte Liebe zu Ignatz lassen sich als Scheitern perspektivieren. Sind es nicht die Hauptfiguren, bei denen etwas schiefgeht, dann sind es häufig die Antagonisten (etwa in *Hawkshaw the Detective* oder *Hairbreadth Harry*). Es ist die Komik des Clowns, spezifischer die des ›Dummen August‹, die in diesen Strips fortlebt, und wie beim Clown ist es ein kontinuierliches, vorhersehbares Scheitern, das Comicfiguren zur Zielscheibe für Spott aber auch zu Sympathieträgern macht. Im frühen Comic gehört das Scheitern fest zum Repertoire und wird fulminant – weit mehr als in der europäischen Bildergeschichte – inszeniert; in krachenden Autounfällen, wirbelnden Körpern und allfälligen Explosionen kommt es zum Ausdruck und lädt zum Lachen ein, aber auch zu Mitleid mit den arg gebeutelten Figuren. Es verwundert daher nicht, dass Künstler_innendarstellungen in frühen Comics überwiegend deren Scheitern darstellen.

Szenen künstlerischen Scheiterns im Comic

Der Künstler als Blender. Der Comiczeichner Shannon Dink veröffentlicht 1908 einen Cartoon, der ein verbreitetes Künstlerbild des 19. Jahrhunderts und darüber hinaus auf den Punkt bringt. Der Cartoon, der als einer von mehreren auf einer Halbseite erscheint, zeigt einen spitzbärtigen Mann mit ausladender Langhaarfrisur an einer Staffelei mit Pinsel und Palette (Abb. 1).[3] Vor ihm steht eine zweite Figur, die künstlerische Ambitionen hegt, wie

"SO YOU WANT TO BE AN ARTIST, MY BOY. TELL ME, CAN YOU DRAW?"
"NO, SIR; BUT I WEAR GLASSES, AND LONG HAIR, AND A BIG TIE. SAY, DOES A ARTIST HAVE TO KNOW HOW TO DRAW IF HE LOOKS LIKE A ARTIST?"

Abb. 1: Shannon Dinks Cartoon bedient sich des zeitgenössischen Stereotyps des Künstlers: langhaarig, eitel und technisch nicht versiert.

die Bildunterschrift nahelegt: »›So you want to be an artist, my boy. Tell me, can you draw?‹ ›No, Sir; but I wear glasses, and long hair, and a big tie. Say, does a artist have to know how to draw if he looks like a artist?‹« Die Pointe zielt hier auf den Künstler als Blender, der eine Reihe von stereotypen Äußerlichkeiten zu bedienen hat, hinter die seine technischen Fähigkeiten zurücktreten. Den Hintergrund für diesen bebilderten Scherz bilden zwei spätestens seit der Moderne zunehmend in Frage gestellten Vorstellungen, denen zufolge Künstler (a) eine besondere Begabung oder gar Begnadung auszeichnen solle, oder sie sich (b) durch ausgiebiges Studium spezielle Fertigkeiten angeeignet haben sollten, die sie jeweils zur Kunstproduktion befähigen.

THE ARTIST'S DISAPPOINTMENT.
1-ARTIST-I'LL WRITE AND ASK SALLIE WHAT SHE WANTS FOR CHRISTMAS, THO' I'M SURE SHE WILL SAY ONE OF MY PAINTINGS.
2-AH, A LETTER FROM HER. IS IT AN OIL OR WATER COLOR, I WONDER?
3-THE LETTER READ-DEAR ALOY-BUY ME A SUNBURST AT BIFFANEY'S.

Abb. 2: In vielen Karikaturen, Bildergeschichten und Comics dieser Zeit wird der stereotype Künstler zum Gegenstand humoristischer Auseinandersetzungen. Arroganz und ein exaltiertes Äußeres sind Teil der Darstellungskonvention.

Arroganz des Künstlers. Unabhängig von dem Vorhandensein einer künstlerischen ›Befähigung‹ werden sie häufig für ihre Haltung kritisiert, speziell für ihre Arroganz. Beispielhaft dafür ist ein Strip, der 1898 im *Los Angeles Herald* als *The Artist's Disappointment* erscheint. Der stereotype Künstler – erneut mit langen Haaren, Fliege und Brille – wird vor seiner Staffelei dargestellt, am Boden liegen als Attribute eine überdimensionale Palette, ein Pinsel und ein Malstock, die ihn als Maler ausweisen. Thematisch angepasst an die Weihnachtsseite, auf der sich der Strip befindet, fragt sich der Künstler, was sich seine Liebste wohl als Geschenk wünsche. Überzeugt davon, dass es nur eines seiner Gemälde sein könne, ist er sichtlich geschockt von der Mitteilung, dass sie ihn, in einer offensichtlichen Anspielung auf die Juwelierkette Tiffany & Co., um ein Schmuckstück von »Biffaney's« bittet (Abb. 2).

Der Künstler als ›Wahnsinniger‹.[4] Noch weiter von der Welt entrückt stellt sich der Künstler 1903 in einem Cartoon dar. Mit einem Malerpinsel in der Hand, einem Eimer Farbe zwischen den Zähnen und wilden Haaren auf dem Kopf, ist er an eine Wand gekettet. Aus sicherer Entfernung betrachten ihn drei Figuren, darunter ein Wärter, der erklärt: »He thinks he's an artist« (Abb. 3). Grosskopf betont, dass »das Vorurteil, der Künstler sei für psychische Erkrankungen besonders

WEARY WALKINS:—UM-HUM. ONCE FELL INTO A VAT FULL O' BEER IN A BREWERY."
NO. 15. HARMLESS
"I GIT PAID FER WOT I KNOW. IS THAT WHY YOU HAVE TO PLAY THE RACES?"
KEEPER: "HE THINKS HE'S AN ARTIST." "HUH! THAT'S NOTHING. LOTS OTHERS THINK THEY ARE, TOO, AND THEY'RE ALL ROAMING AT LARGE."
PAINT
TURPS

Abb. 3: In dieser unsignierten Karikatur werden der stereotyp dargestellte Künstler und der ebenso stereotype ›Wahnsinnige‹ enggeführt.

anfällig, zu den populärsten Künstlermythen der Moderne« zählt (Grosskopf, 252) und der Pathologisierung des Künstlers seit der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts korrespondiert (ebd., 253f.), findet aber in der visuellen Satire des 19. Jahrhunderts nur wenige Beispiele dafür (vgl. ebd., 251). Auch im frühen Comic scheint diese Inszenierung eine Ausnahme zu sein.[5]

Der Künstler als Zauberer. »Entered compartment presenting appearance of extreme disorder—Saw male earth-being holding female earth-being under potent spell—Female, partly swathed in shroud, was unable to move—Ever and anon male earth-being made mesmeric passes with bewhiskered toys dipped in pomade of rain-bow hues« (Condo/Schaefer 1912; Abb. 4). So beschreibt Mr. Skygack 1912 eine Szene in einem Atelier. Der außerirdische Reporter erstattet der Öffentlichkeit seiner Heimat Mars Bericht über die seltsamen Beobachtungen, die er auf dem Nachbarplaneten macht. Als exter-

SKYGACK—A VISITOR FROM MARS
ENTERED COMPARTMENT PRESENTING APPEARANCE OF EXTREME DISORDER——— SAW MALE EARTH-BEING HOLDING FEMALE EARTH-BEING UNDER POTENT SPELL——— FEMALE, PARTLY SWATHED IN SHROUD, WAS UNABLE TO MOVE——— EVER AND ANON MALE EARTH-BEING MADE MESMERIC PASSES WITH BEWHISKERED TOYS DIPPED IN POMADE OF RAIN-BOW HUES.

Abb. 4: Mr. Skygack, der Journalist vom Mars, berichtet von allerlei Phänomenen der amerikanischen Kultur um 1900, die ihn als vermeintlich unvoreingenommenen ›Zugereisten‹ irritieren. So begegnet er auch einem stereotypen Maler, der eine Frau in seinen Bann geschlagen habe.

ner Betrachter inszeniert, erlaubt die Figur dem Autorengespann Armundo D. Condo und Fred Schaefer die gesellschaftlichen Praktiken der USA um 1900 zu thematisieren und den Leser_innen des Chicagoer *Day Book* einen Spiegel vorzuhalten, indem er vertraute Handlungen mit Worten beschreibt, die sie kurios erscheinen lassen, während die weitgehend naturalistisch gezeichneten und nur leicht abstrahierten Bilder (gezeichnet von Condo) als Kontrastfolie zu den Beschreibungen fungieren. In der oben beschriebenen Szene sitzt eine Dame einem stereotyp langhaarigen Maler Modell (s. o.). Diesen platziert Condo mit dem Rücken zum Betrachter vor einer Atelierstaffelei und stattet ihn mit den typischen Attributen aus: Pinsel (»bewhiskered toys«, Farbtuben (»pomade of rain-bow hues«) usw. Schaefer und Condo zeigen den Künstler als lächerliche Figur, auch das eine Form des Scheiterns: der Künstler erscheint als Chaot, der eine kryptische Handlung ausführt, die magisch zu sein scheint, schlägt sie das Modell doch in ihren Bann (»potent spell«), der es gleichsam versteinern lässt. Ohne Kenntnis über den gesellschaftlichen Kontext, d. h. den kulturellen Hintergrund der Portraitmalerei sowie ihre soziale Funktion und ihre Bedeutung – ihre Semantik sowohl als auch ihre Relevanz –, erscheint diese ›magische‹ Praktik unverständlich und dieser Unbegreiflichkeit unterstellen Condo und Schaefer Komik. Die Inszenierung des Künstlers als Zauberer hat eine lange Tradition (vgl. Kuni, 9ff.), die auch im Comic weitergeschrieben wird, nicht nur von Condo und Schaefer.

Lebendige Bilder. Die Tradition des Erzählens von lebendig werdenden Bildern reicht bis in die Antike zurück, namentlich zu dem Bildhauer Pygmalion, der sich in eine von ihm geschaffene Plastik verliebt, der die Göttin Venus das Leben verleiht (Ovid, 495–497). Im 19. Jahrhundert erfährt das Motiv u. a. Aufmerksamkeit in als kanonisch bewerteten literarischen Texten von E.T.A. Hoffmann und Edgar Alan Poe. Es verwundert daher nicht, dass das Motiv auch seinen Weg in Comics findet, sei es vermittelt über literarische Texte oder frühere Bildergeschichten, in denen es ebenfalls vorkommt. In der *Washington Times* veröffentlicht der in Worms geborene ›Hy‹ Mayer 1904 eine Bildergeschichte mit dem Titel *Professor Presto, Master of Magic*, in der der titelgebende Prestidigitateur einem Maler, der soeben sein Portrait fertiggestellt hat, mittels Magie (oder Hypnose) vorspiegelt, sein gemaltes Alter Ego sei lebendig geworden. Der gemalte Professor Presto spielt dem Maler allerlei Streiche, bis dieser im letzten Bild aufwacht »as from a dream« und das Gemälde unbeweglich und leblos vorfindet (Abb. 5). Das Gemälde ist gelungen, es ist »[a] work of art excelled by none« und der Künstler betont: »›Observe the picture's lifelike air: It is your image to a hair.‹« Dennoch wird der Maler unter den Handgreiflichkeiten des Portraits zum Gegenstand des Spotts. Mayers Geschichte erinnert an Zeuxis, nur ist die Meisterschaft des Malers hier so groß, dass er selbst das Bild nicht mehr von der Realität zu unterscheiden vermag, zumindest unter dem Einfluss des schalkhaften Professors. Den Leser_innen zeigt ein vergleichender Blick, dass der Maler die Eskapaden keineswegs nur imaginiert hat, denn der Gesichtsausdruck des

Abb. 5: Henry ›Hy‹ Mayer ersinnt mit in *Professor Presto, Master of Magic* eine Variante des Pygmalion-Stoffes. Hier erweckt nicht der talentierte Maler das Portrait zum Leben, sondern der mit Illusionskräften begabte Portraitierte.

Gemalten hat sich zwischen dem erstem und dem letzten Panel sichtlich verändert. Dass das ›lebendige‹ Gemälde bedrohlich ist, ist keine Erfindung Mayers; schon in Poes *Oval Portrait* (1842/1845) erlischt mit der Vollendung des Bildes das Lebenslicht der Portraitierten (vgl. Poe, 204). Bei Mayer rächt sich nun, wie es scheint, das Gemälde an seinem Schöpfer, allerdings auf eine spielerische und letztlich harmlose Weise, die für frühe Zeitungscomics typisch ist.

1908 zeichnet Richard F. Outcault eine Folge von *Buster Brown*, die einen zweiten Typus des belebten Bildes in den Mittelpunkt rückt, der auch in anderen Comics aufgegriffen wird und der als Variante des Zeuxis-Motivs aufgefasst werden kann. Buster gibt sich in dem Strip in einer Karte an seinen Onkel als Maler aus und preist ihm ein Gemälde an: »I've painted a wonderful dog which almost barks. […] If he stays here much longer he'll bite me. Yours for nothing!« (Abb. 6) Verkleidet mit künstlichem Bart, Langhaarperücke und Hut mimt er den Künstler. Der Onkel ist begeistert von dem Werk, bis das Bild von Tige sich als durchaus realer Hund herausstellt, der aus dem Bilderrahmen springt und den Onkel umreißt. In der moralischen Nachschrift am Ende des Strips reflektiert Buster nicht über das lebendig werden der Bilder, sondern über die Kunstkritik:

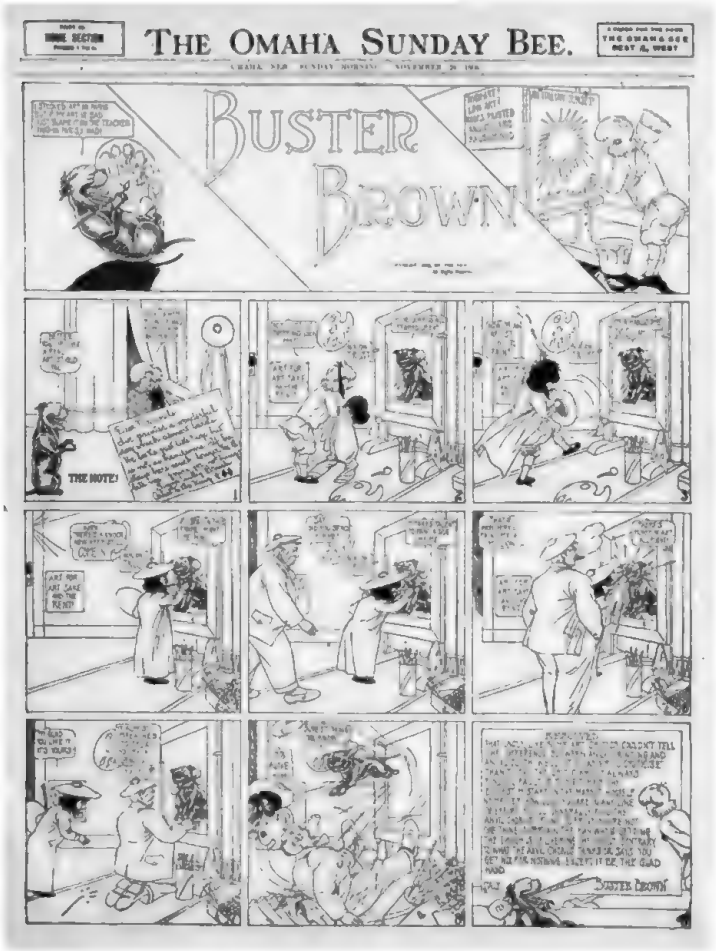


Abb. 6: Ebenfalls auf den antiken Pygmalion rekurriert Outcault in dieser Episode von *Buster Brown*, in der Tige sich als Gemälde ausgibt, das zum Leben erwacht.

> Resolved. That uncle, like some art critics, couldn't tell the difference between an oil painting and an oil cloth. […] It's easier to criticise, than to do; the critic who is always finding fault, is sometimes the biggest mistake in the market himself. No matter how good you are in any line of effort, you'll generally find the anvil chorus trying to prove you're not. One thing is certain, the man who is getting the dough is delivering the goods; contrary to what the anvil chorus thinks or says. You get nix for nothing; except it be, the glad hand.

Outcault stellt Buster im Kopf mit einem breiten Pinsel dar, der aus dem Werkzeugkasten eines Anstreichers zu stammen scheint. Ein Poster preist entsprechende Arbeiten an: »High Art! Low Art! Roofs Painted and Cellars Kalsomined.« Outcault rekurriert damit auf die Darstellung des Künstlers als bloßer ›Handwerker‹, die in der Künstler_innenkarikatur des 19. Jahrhunderts verbreitet ist (vgl. Grosskopf, 114ff.). Sowohl Outcaults als auch Mayers Scherz – der ›echte‹ Hund, der sich als Bild ausgibt sowie das Bild, das sich wie eine ›echte‹ Figur geriert – basieren auf der medienspezifischen Voraussetzung, dass im gezeichneten Bild Zeichnungen der ersten Stufe (Figuren, Räume, Gegenstände) und der zweiten Stufe (d. h. Zeichnungen von Zeich-

nungen bzw. Bilder von Bildern) materiell nicht unterscheidbar seien müssen. Sie werden vielmehr erst durch zusätzliche Informationen, meist Rahmungen, unterscheidbar gemacht.

Der Künstler und die Tunichtgute. ›Lausejungen‹ nach dem Vorbild von Wilhelm Buschs *Max und Moritz*, die ihre Mitmenschen mit Streichen piesacken, erfreuen sich um 1900 großer Beliebtheit als Protagonisten von Comics. Rudolph Dirks' Katzenjammer Kids sind fraglos die bekanntesten. 1912 zeichnet Dirks die Geschichte *The Katzenjammers in High Life*, in welcher der Captain mit den Kids einen Portraitmaler aufsucht (Abb. 7). Während er dem

Abb. 7: Eine Begegnung mit Lausbuben und ihren Streichen hat auch dieser Maler in Dirks' *Katzenjammer Kids*.

Maler Modell sitzt, teilt er u. a. einen Gemeinplatz über Künstler mit, die keiner geregelten und deshalb im Grunde keiner Arbeit nachgingen (»Vunce I had a uncle vot vos a artist but now his is woiking again!«). Während sich der nicht minder stereotype Maler an seine Arbeit macht, präparieren die Kinder den Fußboden hinter ihm mit Farben, auf denen jener im vierten Panel ausrutscht und stolpert, wobei er den zuvor durch die Kinder gezielt platzierten Zylinder des Captains zerbeult und sein Gemälde beschädigt. Kapitän und Maler geraten darüber in Streit und einigen sich schließlich in einer romantischen Geste auf ein Duell im Morgengrauen, um Satisfaktion zu erhalten. Doch schnell kommen sie den Übeltätern auf die Spur, verbrüdern sich und bestrafen die Kinder, indem sie sie mit flacher Hand und Malerstock verprügeln. Zur Strafe müssen sie es obendrein über sich ergehen lassen, dass der Maler sie weinend und schreiend portraitiert.

Neben den Katzenjammer Kids hat es zahlreiche ähnliche Figuren gegeben, zum Teil direkte Kopien der Dirks'schen Figuren. Little Jimmy ist eine Lausbuben-Figur von James ›Jimmy‹ Swinnerton. 1922 begegnen Jimmy bei einem Picknick zufällig einem Freilichtmaler, der soeben sein »masterpiece« vollendet hat. Der Künstlertypus des Freilichtmalers entsteht zusammen mit der Pleinairmalerei selbst in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts und wird bald in der Bildsatire aufgegriffen (vgl. Grosskopf, 177 et passim). Während sich der Maler des 19. Jahrhunderts in der freien Natur seinen Karikaturen zufolge mit seiner ureigenen

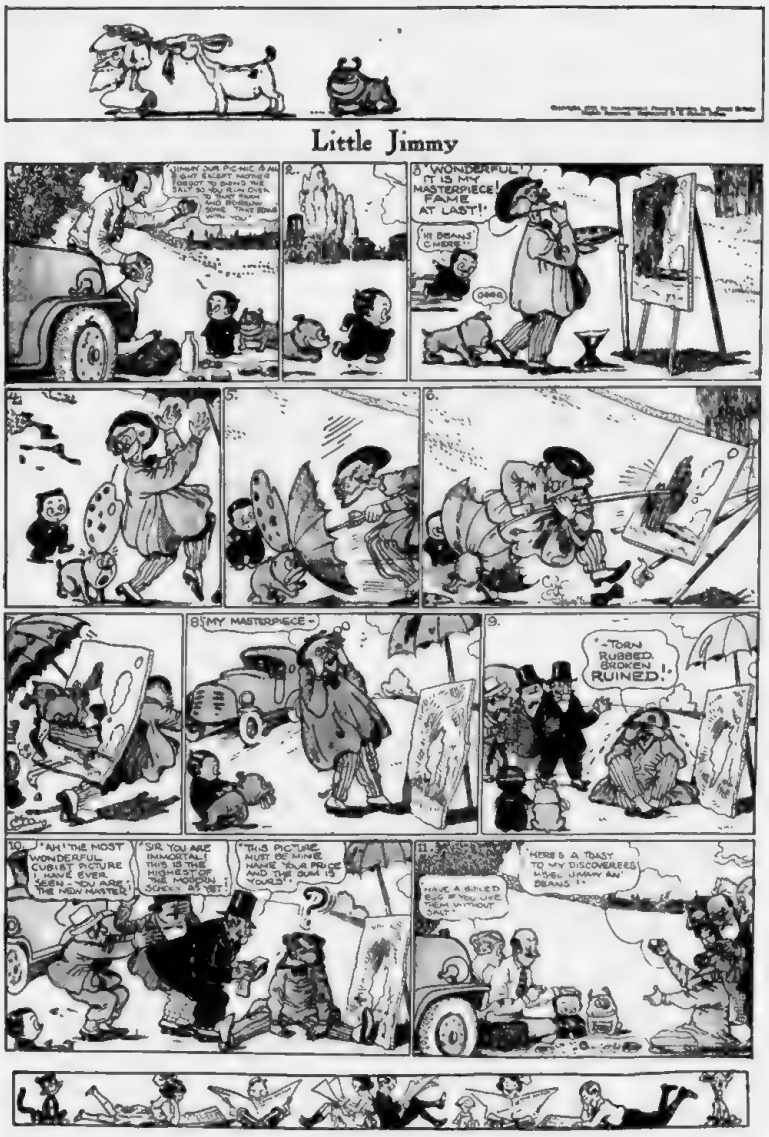

Little Jimmy
3. "WONDERFUL! IT IS MY MASTERPIECE! FAME AT LAST!"
HI BEANS CHEESE!
8. MY MASTERPIECE
9.
"TORN RUBBED BROKEN! RUINED!"
10. "AH! THE MOST WONDERFUL CUBIST PICTURE I HAVE EVER SEEN - YOU ARE THE NEW MASTER"
"SIR, YOU ARE IMMORTAL! THIS IS THE HIGHEST OF THE MODERN! SOLD AT YET!"
"THIS PICTURE MUST BE MINE. NAME YOUR PRICE AND THE SUM IS YOURS!"
11.
"HERE'S A TOAST TO MY DISCOVERERS MISS. JIMMY AN' BEANS !!"
HAVE A BOILED EGG IF YOU LIKE THEM WITHOUT SALT

Abb. 8: In dieser Folge von Jimmy Swinnertons Lausbuben-Strip *Jimmy* fällt ein Künstler geradewegs in seinen Rahmen und ›zerstört‹ dabei das Bild, das in dem an spätere Arbeiten von Lucio Fontana erinnernden Zustand ein Erfolg wird.

Faulheit, anderen Malern, Wind und Wetter sowie der Landbevölkerung herumzuschlagen hat, wie Grosskopf dargestellt hat (230ff.), ist die Begegnung mit dem Lausejungen ein Spezifikum der amerikanischen Comics. Bei dem Versuch Jimmys Hund Beans zu verscheuchen, wird der Maler handgreiflich und fällt schließlich geradewegs in seine Leinwand, die dabei zerreißt und sein Meisterwerk vernichtet. Doch das Scheitern des Künstlers nimmt eine Wende als drei Kunstsammler, die augenscheinlich eine Landpartie machen, unerwartet auf den verzweifelten Maler treffen und dessen Gemälde als »the most wonderful cubist picture« erleben, als »the highest of the modern school as yet« und ihn selbst als »immortal« (Abb. 8). Als klassischer Maler scheitert Swinnertons Künstlerfigur, doch als Schöpfer ›moderner Kunst‹ wird er sogleich wiedergeboren. Das in der Mitte zerrissene Bild deutet voraus auf die *Tagli*-Werkgruppe von Lucio Fontana, wie schon in der Kunstkarikatur des 19. Jahrhunderts regelmäßig ästhetische Strategien wie die (spätere) kubistische Abstraktion zur Deformation der karikierten Bildwerke verwendet werden, weshalb Alexander Roob in den europäischen Satiremagazinen den Ursprung der modernen Kunst verortet. Doch in Swinnertons Comicstrip – und ebenso in der diesbezüglich relevanten Kunstkarikatur beruht die Pointe darauf, dass das ›moderne Kunstwerk‹ ästhetisch misslungen und als ›wirkliches‹ Kunstwerk disqualifiziert ist.

Mit einem Riss in der Leinwand spielt auch schon eine Episode von William F. Mariners und Otis F. Woods rassistischem Comicstrip *Sambo and His Funny Noises* aus dem Jahr 1909. Sambo trifft im Freien auf einen (weißen) Maler (mit langen Haaren, Schleife, Pinseln usw.), der ihn im gleichen Atemzug als »little charcoal study« verunglimpft und ihn auffordert, gegen einen Cent sein Bild zu bewachen (Abb. 9). Zwei weiße Jungen, Sambos Antagonisten, finden ihn vor der Staffe-

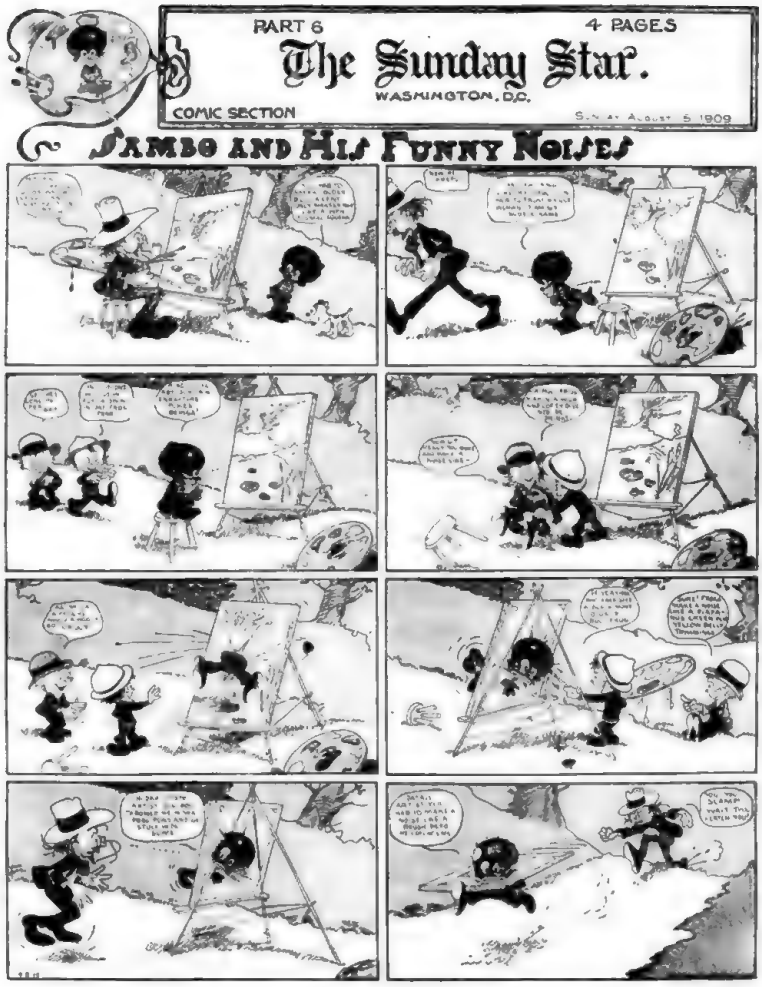


Abb. 9: Der Sturz in die Leinwand wird auch von Otis Wood herangezogen, hier zu einer rassistischen Pointe.

lei sitzend vor und beschließen, ihn in den auf dem Bild dargestellten Froschteich zu werfen, also in die Leinwand, die dadurch zerreißt. Während Sambo in der Leinwand festsitzt, malen die Jungen sein Gesicht an: »De very idea / who ever seed a black moke colored bull frog.« Die krude Pointe liegt hier offenkundig darin, dass der ›farbige‹ Sambo ›koloriert‹ wird.

Der Lausbube als Künstler. Bereits ein Jahr zuvor, 1908, war Sambo selbst als Pleinairmaler aufgetreten. »When deres a noise like spring in de air den's de time a artist jest has to commune wid nature[.] / Sure! I inherits my art[.] My pop wus de champeen whitewasher«, eröffnet die Figur die Geschichte und rekurriert damit gleichermaßen auf das Malen unter freiem Himmel sowie auf die Darstellung des Künstlers als Handwerker, wobei der Scherz, dass sein Vater ein Weißmaler gewesen sei, hier eine rassistische Komponente enthält, die in der Kunstsatire die Ausnahme ist. Statt zum Malen zu kommen, schnappen ihn die beiden Antagonisten und missbrauchen ihn als Pinsel, womit auf Sambos krause Haare verwiesen wird (Abb. 10). Als Künstler kommt der afroamerikanische Junge für seine Altersgenossen nicht in Frage, seine Bemühungen können in ihren Augen nur scheitern. In diesem Strip wird der jeglichen Agens beraubte Sambo jedoch am Ende für das ›mit seiner Hilfe‹ entstandene Gemälde belohnt, indem ein offenbar zufällig erscheinender Monsieur Jules de Splash-insky ihm für seine weitere künstlerische Tätigkeit ein Stipendium in Form eines Barchecks zuerkennt. Comics, in denen Kinder als Künstler in Erscheinung treten, schließen an eine Tradition der Kunstkritik an, die der Kunstproduktion Infantilität unterstellt. Nicht selten wurde in der visuellen Satire des 19. Jahrhunderts das Kind als Künstler inszeniert, um

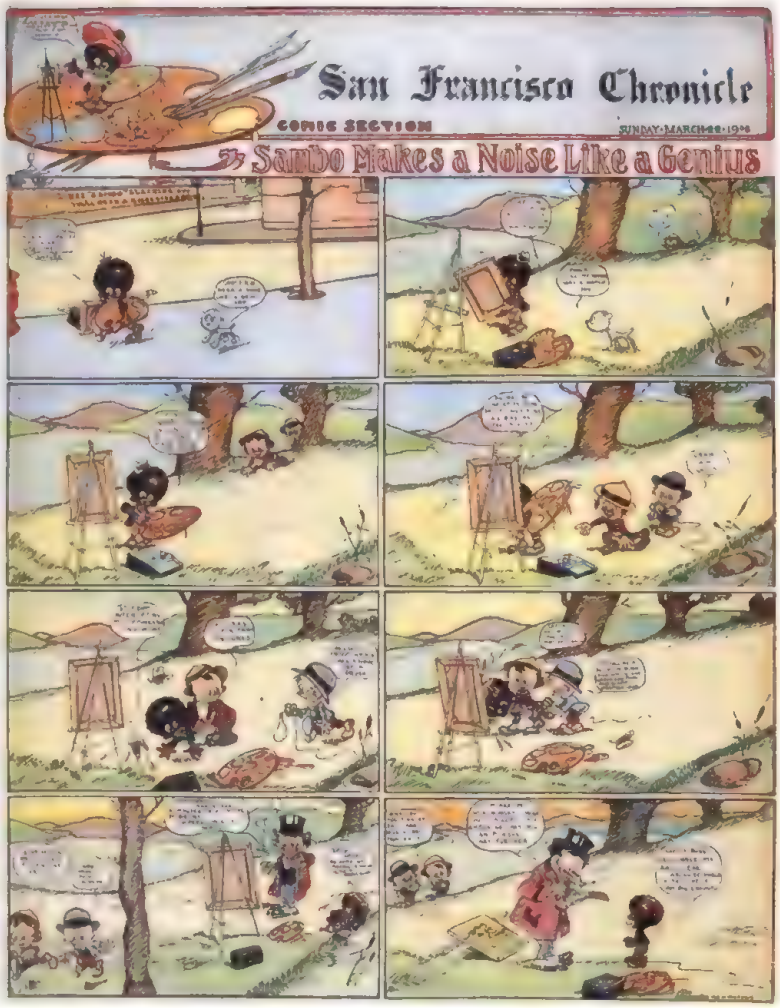


Abb. 10: Schon ein Jahr zuvor tritt Sambo selbst als Maler in Erscheinung.

die Kunst, speziell die Malerei, als technisch inkompetente Geschmiere zu kritisieren (vgl. Grosskopf, 259ff.). Das kritische Moment tritt allerdings im Comic zugunsten der unterhaltsamen Pointe in den Hintergrund und liegt allerhöchstens latent darin verborgen. Ein Beispiel ist die 1914 erschienene Episode *Snookums Goes In For Art* von George McManus's *The Newlyweds*. Snookums, das Baby der Newlyweds, bemächtigt sich in einem Moment der Unachtsamkeit seiner Eltern des Pinsels eines Pleinairmalers und ›überarbeitet‹ dessen im Entstehen begriffenes »masterpiece«. Während der Künstler darüber verzweifelt, ist Snookums Mutter entzückt: »Oh, lovely! Snookums is a genius!« (Abb. 11).

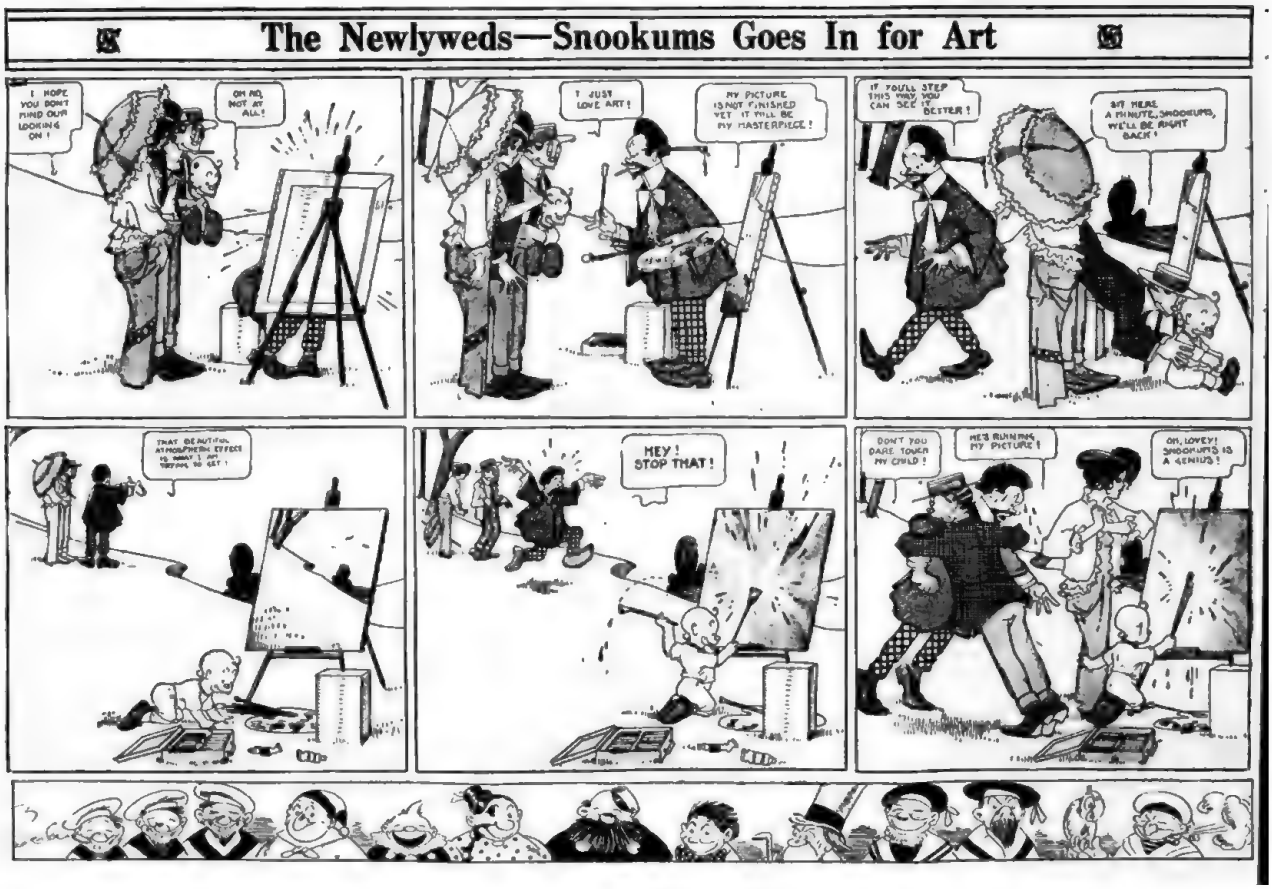

The Newlyweds—Snookums Goes In for Art
I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND OUR LOOKING ON!
OH NO, NOT AT ALL!
I JUST LOVE ART!
MY PICTURE IS NOT FINISHED YET IT WILL BE MY MASTERPIECE!
IF YOU'LL STEP THIS WAY YOU CAN SEE IT BETTER!
SIT HERE A MINUTE, SNOOKUMS, WE'LL BE RIGHT BACK!
THAT BEAUTIFUL ATMOSPHERIC EFFECT IS WHAT I AM TRYING TO GET!
HEY! STOP THAT!
DON'T YOU DARE TOUCH MY CHILD!
HE'S RUINING MY PICTURE!
OH, LOVEY! SNOOKUMS IS A GENIUS!

Abb. 11: Kinder werden nicht selten als Künstlerinnen und Künstler inszeniert, um die zeitgenössische avantgardistische Kunst zu karikieren, so hier in einer Folge von McManus' *The Newlyweds*.

Im Falle Sambos verbindet sich der unterstellte Infantilismus v. a. moderner Kunst mit einem ebenfalls bereits im 19. Jahrhundert zur kritischen Pointierung herangezogener Primitivismus (vgl. Grosskopf, 287ff.). Wurde in der graphischen Kunstsatire zuvor (und danach) häufig der Affe für Vergleiche herangezogenen, bei denen u. a. Künstler als unfähig, Kunstwerke als Gekritzel oder Kunstrichtungen als Idiotien abgetan wurden, wird hier der afro-amerikanische Junge als ›Primitiver‹ inszeniert.

Ein weiterer Aspekt der Kunst- und Künstler_innendarstellung im Comic soll im Folgenden ausführlicher umrissen werden, der comic-spezifisch und insofern keineswegs nur ausgehend von der europäischen Karikatur und Bildergeschichtet aus betrachtet werden kann: die selbstreflexive Darstellung von Comickunst im Comic – und ihr Scheitern.

Das Scheitern der Comickunst

Im September und Oktober 1908 erscheinen im *Los Angeles Herald* insgesamt fünf Folgen einer Comicserie mit dem Titel *Johnie Joker the »Comic Artist«* aus der Feder von C. Deball.[6] Die titelgebende Hauptfigur der kurzlebigen Serie zeichnet Cartoons und Comics und versucht, sie an Zeitungsredaktionen zu verkaufen. In der ersten Folge vom 6. September 1908 trifft er auf einen »Art Editor«, der anhand seines stereotypen Akzents als deutscher Migrant zu erkennen ist (»Ach Himmel! Sooch a funnyness vot?«), ein Figurentyp, der in der Frühzeit der Comics oft für komische Effekte herangezogen wurde (u. a. in Dirks' *Katzenjammer Kids*). In späteren Folgen trifft Joker u. a. auf einen französischen und einen englischen Bildredakteur. In lockerem, an Töpffer erinnernden Pinselstrich erzählt, lässt Deball Johnie der Reihe nach seine Zeichnungen präsentieren, die jeweils großformatig als Bild-im-Bild dargestellt werden. Die Witze basieren überwiegend auf Wortspielen, die meist in einfache Bilder von zweifelhafter Komik umgesetzt werden. So zeigt das erste dieser Bilder »a strong cigar«: eine Zigarre, die ein schweres Gewicht stemmt. Die Geschichten enden grundsätzlich mit einer Enttäuschung für den Künstler, überwiegend mit einem Rauswurf aus der Redaktion: in drei von fünf Episoden fliegt er rücklings aus dem letzten Panel und in

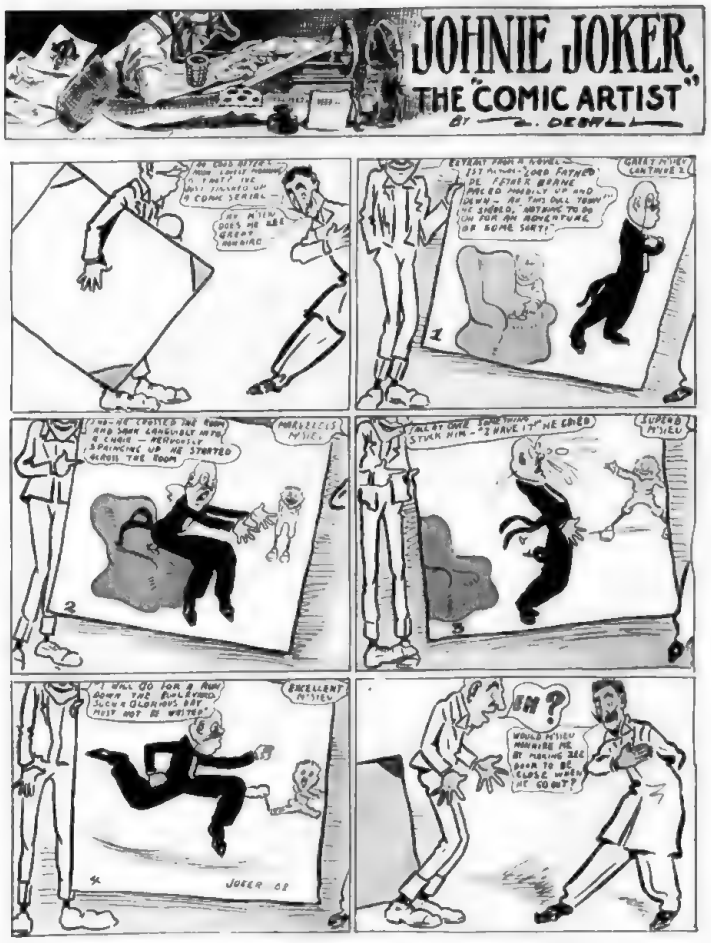


Abb. 12: C. Deball zeigt einen Comiczeichner als scheiternden Künstler.

einem erhält er einen Tritt, der ihn aus dem Panel katapultiert – beide Pointen finden sich sehr häufig in frühen Gagstrips. Nur im zweiten Strip vom 27. September erzählt Johnie eine Geschichte in Bildern, die als »extract from a novel« eingeführt wird. Darin wird ein banaler Streich erzählt, den ein Junge, der sichtlich an Max und Moritz bzw. die Katzenjammer Kids erinnert, einem distinguierten Herrn spielt. Zunächst versteckt jener einige Heftzwecken auf dessen Sessel, im Anschluss bewirft er ihn obendrein mit einem Stein oder Ei (Abb. 12). Wie die Wortspiele sind diese Kapriolen eines stereotypen Tunichtguts 1908 längst abgegriffen und die ablehnende Reaktion der Bildredakteure ist nur zu erwartbar. Einzig der deutschstämmige Redakteur kauft dem darbenden Künstler für fünf Dollar einige Cartoons ab, woraufhin dieser sich in Phantasien über eine gute Mahlzeit ergeht, nur um im letzten Panel den Großteil der Summe an seine Vermieterin abtreten zu müssen.

Innovativ sind an Deballs Strip weder die eingebetteten Cartoons aus der Feder von Johnie, noch die Pointen der einzelnen Episoden; beide Gruppen von Witzen sind – vermutlich intentional – verschlissen. Der Comickünstler, den uns Deball vorführt, ist eine klägliche Gestalt; mit der übergroßen Zeichenmappe und dem schlaksigen Körper erinnert er an Buschs Maler Klecksel (Busch, Bd. 2, 530), dessen Gefecht mit dem Zeitungsredakteur jedoch glücklicher ausgeht als Johnies' (ebd., 540–548). Wie schon sein Name nahelegt, ist Johnie Joker selbst eine stereotype Figur, ebenso wie der Künstler im Kopf des Strips mit seiner geflickten Hose und den abgeschmackten Zeichnungen aus seiner Produktion. Neu ist hier vielmehr der Versuch, einen ganzen Comicstrip auf den Erlebnissen eines *Comic*-Künstlers aufzubauen. Das nächste Unterfangen dieser Art, Mort Walkers und Jerry Dumas' selbstreferentieller Zeitungsstrip *Sam's Strip* fällt erst in die 1960er Jahre. Und auch dieser Strip, obschon erfolgreicher als Deballs, wird bereits nach rund 20 Monaten eingestellt (vgl. Walker/Dumas; Bachmann 2016, 76–78).

Auch andere Zeichner_innen stellen in dieser Zeit Comickünstler dar. In *The Troubles of One of Our First Families* schließt H.C. Greening 1906 an den Diskurs um die Darstellung der Prähistorie und den Urmenschen an, der seit dem zweiten Drittel des 19. Jahrhundert an Bedeutung gewinnt. Stephanie Moser und Clive Gamble identifizieren drei Traditionen der Darstellung der Vorgeschichte, eine romantische (Moser/Gamble, 191–194), die die Vorzeit verklärt, eine archäologische (ebd., 194–204), die sie sich von der Verklärung zu lösen versucht, sowie eine komische Traditionslinie (ebd., 204f.), an die Greening anknüpft. Der Beginn dieser komischen Tradition, den Moser und Gamble in die Mitte der 1890er Jahre legen, fällt historisch mit dem Entstehen der Comics zusammen (ebd., 204). Die humoristische Darstellung des Urmenschen bedient sich zwar des gleichen Zeicheninventars wie die vorangegangenen Traditionslinien (Höhle, Steinwerkzeuge, Tierhäute, lange Haare, gedrungene Statur usw.; vgl. ebd., 187f.), verfolgt aber primär unterhaltende Intentionen. Als Gegenstände von Karikaturen und Comics seien die Urmenschen deshalb besonders reizvoll gewesen, so Moser und Gamble, weil wir, indem

wir über den prähistorischen Menschen lachen, über uns selbst lachen können (vgl. ebd., 204). So erklärt sich auch der Erfolg der Zeichentrickserie *The Flintstones* (1960–1966), in der das Leben in der Urzeit lediglich als eine krudere, ahistorische Version des Lebens im 20. Jahrhunderts inszeniert wird, in der Autos aus Stein sind und die Spülmaschine ein wasserspeiender Dinosaurier und die Flintstones völlig zurecht im Vorspann als »modern stone age family« vorgestellt werden. Greening verfolgt bereits 1908 die gleiche Idee: Der Sohn des steinzeitlichen Protagonisten hat mittels eines Lehrbuchs das Zeichnen gelernt, doch sogleich versucht der Vater ihn zu übertrumpfen, indem er auf einen Felsen eine Karikatur seiner Frau und des gemeinsamen Dinosaurierhaustiers zeichnet. Beide sind sichtlich unzufrieden mit seiner Leistung und halten sich mithilfe von Schlägen und Tritten schadlos (Abb. 13). »An artist's life is cruel and uncertain«, kommentiert eine in Stein gemeißelte Moral im letzten Panel: »Genius is the capacity for taking infinite pains—my capacity is 52037109 pains judging from the way I feel.« Greening gibt hier nicht bloß den Menschen dem Lachen preis, sondern speziell den Zeichner komischer Bilder, es ist der »comic artist«, der hier über sein Scheitern und seinen Berufsstand lacht – und nebenbei eine künstlerische Traditionslinie behauptet, die später im Diskurs über Comics von verschiedenen Seiten und mit unterschiedlichen Zwecken aufgegriffen wurde (vgl. z. B. Eisner, 7 et passim).

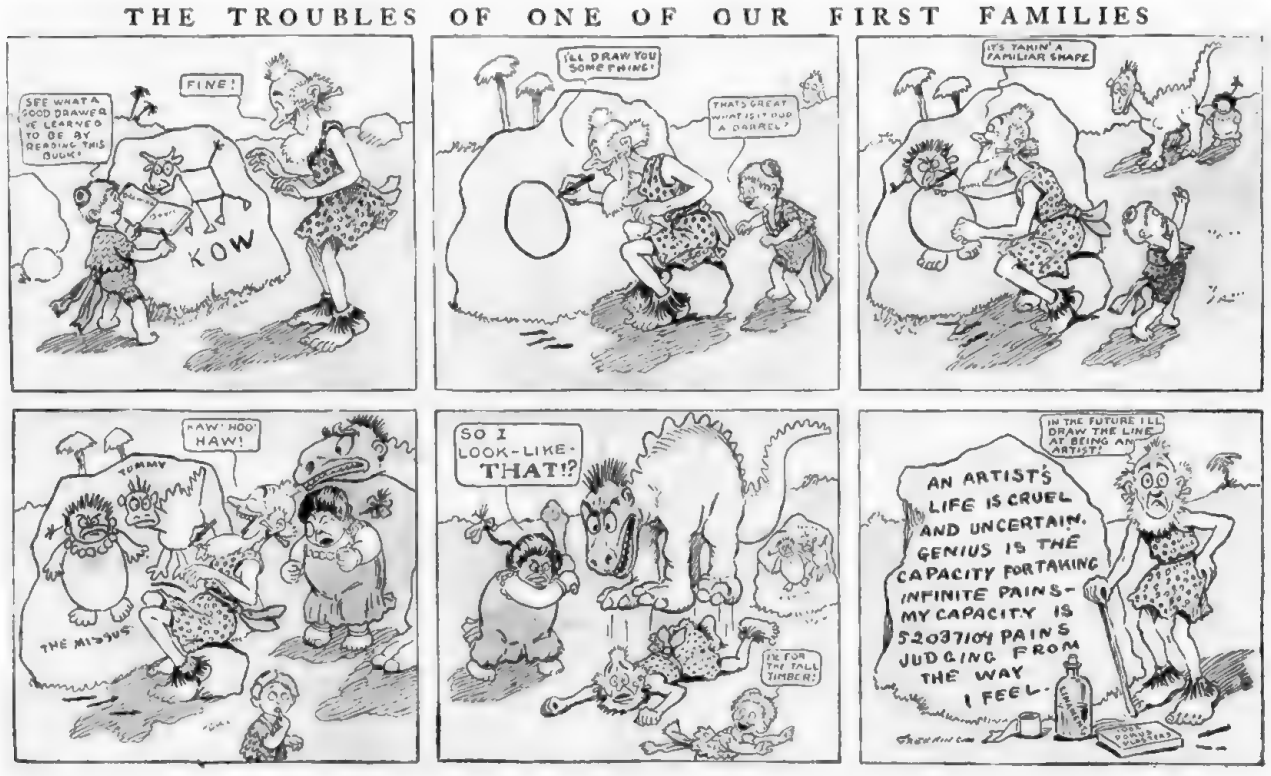

THE TROUBLES OF ONE OF OUR FIRST FAMILIES
FINE!
KOW
I'LL DRAW YOU SOMETHING!
IT'S TAKIN' A FAMILIAR SHAPE
HAW! HOO! HAW!
TOMMY
SO I LOOK-LIKE-THAT!?
AN ARTIST'S LIFE IS CRUEL AND UNCERTAIN. GENIUS IS THE CAPACITY FOR TAKING INFINITE PAINS- MY CAPACITY IS 52037109 PAINS JUDGING FROM THE WAY I FEEL-
IN THE FUTURE I'LL DRAW THE LINE AT BEING AN ARTIST!

Abb. 13: In diesem Strip stellt H.C. Greening einen prähistorischen Menschen als Karikaturisten dar, dessen Werke auf wenig Gegenliebe stoßen, umso mehr aber auf Hiebe.

Noch direkter tritt der Künstler in einer ebenfalls 1908 (immerhin dreizehn Jahre vor Luigi Pirandellos selbstreflexiven Theaterstück *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*) gedruckten Episode von Harry ›Hy‹ Gages *Oh Fine! Here's Mr. Grouch* auf. Der titelgebende Miesepeter findet sich in den Sunday Comics verunglimpft und beschließt: »I'm going to find the crazy artist who draws these horrible caricatures of me and batter his brains out!« Der unzufriedene Porträtierte sucht den Künstler auf, der hemdsärmelig auf einer Seifenkiste an einem notdürftig reparierten Tisch arbeitet. Doch statt ihn wie geplant zu bestrafen, geschieht Grouch ein Missgeschick und am Ende steht er erneut als Witzfigur da. Den Künstler gestaltet Gage unverhohlen als sein Alter Ego. Seine Figur mag seine Kunst für gescheitert halten, doch am Ende behält der Zeichner die Oberhand (Abb. 14).

OH FINE! HERE'S MR. GROUCH
I TELL YOU I WON'T STAND THIS OUTRAGE ANY LONGER! I'M GOING TO FIND THE CRAZY ARTIST WHO DRAWS THESE HORRIBLE CARICATURES OF ME AND BATTER HIS BRAINS OUT!
BUT DEARIE, HE TRIES TO MAKE ME LOOK NICE!
SUNDAY COMICS MR GROUCH
PLEASE DON'T BE ROUGH WITH HIM!
THAT ARTIST'LL BE COMIN' WHEN I GET THROUGH WITH HIM! G-R-R-R!
SUCCOR! ASSISTANCE!
SCOUNDREL! I CAUGHT YOU IN THE ACT — YOU WILL MAKE UGLY PICTURES OF ME, WILL YOU?
O SPARE MUM!
SPOOF! THAT'S THE LAST PICTURE YOU'LL EVER MAKE—
SOAP
ALL RIGHT-SEND 'EM IN! I'LL ALWAYS TREAT YOU RIGHT
I COULD GIVE YOU A BARREL OF MR GROUCH IDEAS

Abb. 14: In *Oh Fine! Here's Mr. Grouch* stellt ›Hy‹ Gage sein Alter Ego in einer Auseinandersetzung mit seiner Figur dar.

1916 zeichnet sich Outcault selbst in einen *Buster-Brown*-Strip mit dem Titel *Anyway, the Spot Came Out!* hinein. Im ersten Panel der Geschichte betrachtet Buster ein Bild: »Pa has been drawing my picture – guess I'll draw too!« Das Bild-im-Bild ist mit der Bildunterschrift ›Papa's Angel‹ versehen und zeigt Buster als Engelchen mit Flügeln und Nimbus. Noch bevor er zum Zeichnen kommt, verschüttet Buster versehentlich Tusche, die er in den folgenden Bildern mittels einer überdimensionierten Bürste aus dem Teppich zu entfernen versucht – ohne Erfolg

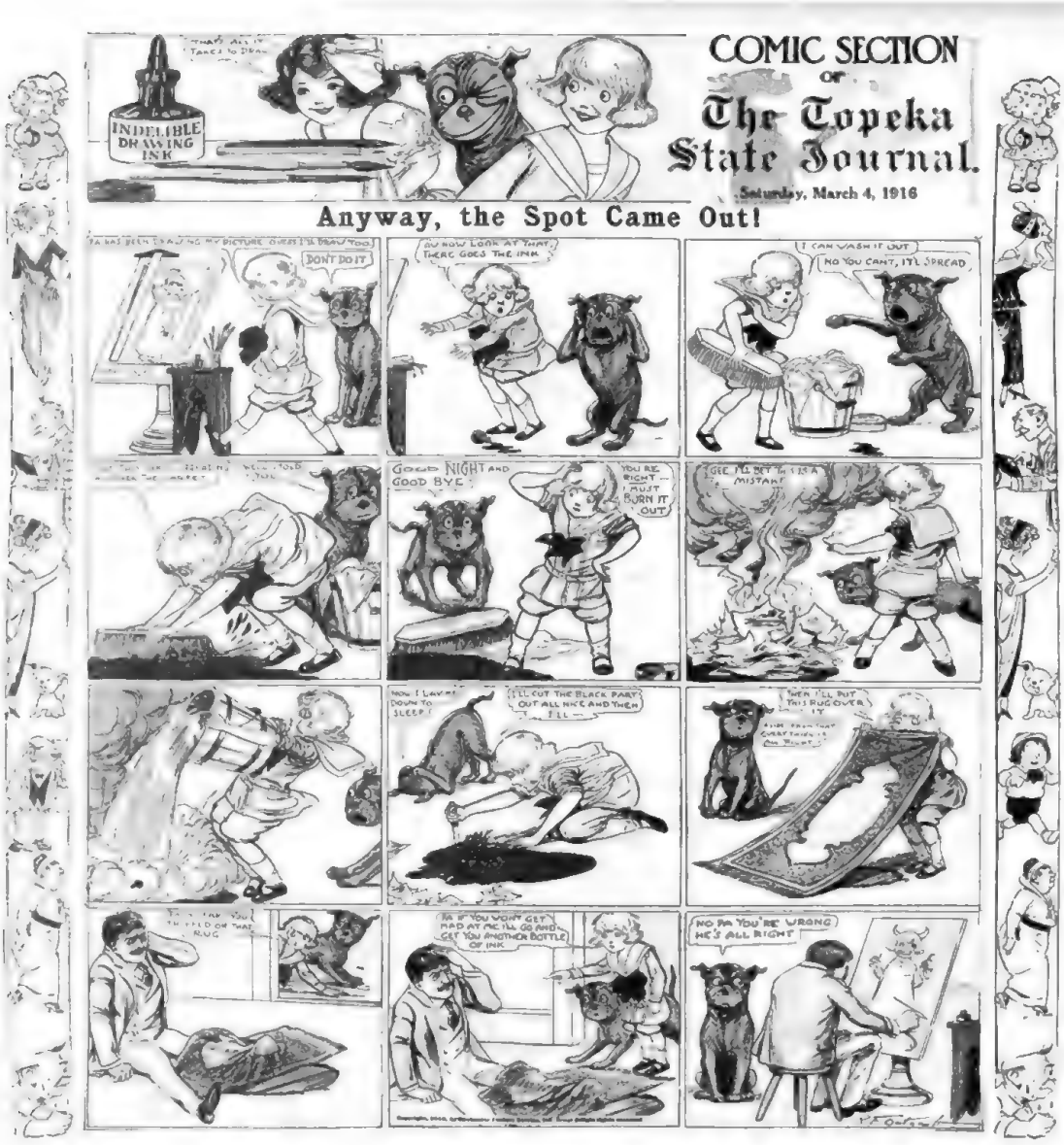
›malt‹ er mit der Bürste auf dem Teppich, wobei er einmal mehr an das Motiv des Künstlers als Handwerker erinnert (Abb. 15). Da sich der immer größer werdende Fleck nicht entfernen lässt, schneidet Buster ihn aus und verdeckt das Loch mit einem Läufer, über den sein »Pa« stolpert. Dieser Vater, den Outcault als sein Alter Ego zeichnet, verändert im letzten Panel das Bild von Buster, indem er die Flügel entfernt und den Heiligenschein durch Hörner ersetzt.

COMIC SECTION
OF
The Topeka
State Journal.
Saturday, March 4, 1916
Anyway, the Spot Came Out!
INDELIBLE DRAWING INK
DONT DO IT
OH NOW LOOK AT THAT, THERE GOES THE INK
I CAN WASH IT OUT
NO YOU CANT, IT'L SPREAD
GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD BYE
YOU'RE RIGHT — I MUST BURN IT OUT
I'LL CUT THE BLACK PART OUT ALL NICE AND THEN I'LL —
WHEN I'LL PUT THIS RUG OVER IT
IF YOU DON'T GET MAD AT ME I'LL GO AND GET YOU ANOTHER BOTTLE OF INK
NO PA YOU'RE URONG HE'S ALL RIGHT

Abb. 15: Das gezeichnete Alter Ego R.F. Outcaults tritt ebenfalls in dessen Strips auf.

Als letztes Beispiel sei auf eine Episode von A.D. Condos und Fred Schaefers *Osgar and Adolf* hingewiesen, die 1912 in *The Day Book* erscheint. Unter dem Titel *Osgar Resuses* [sic] *to be a Nincompoop* erzählt Condo in fünf Bildern wie Osgar und Adolf ihren eigenen Strip zeichnen. Der Redakteur weist sie ein: »Boys, the team that puts you before the public is off today,

and I want you to do it. Osgar, you get up the ›words,‹ and Adolf, you the ›Music.‹« Beide beschließen den jeweils anderen zur Pointe des Texts bzw. der Bilder zu machen, worüber sie in Streit geraten und das Atelier verwüsten (Abb. 16). Hier sind es nun die Comicfiguren, die ihre Schöpfer ersetzen sollen – und dabei scheitern.

RESUSES TO BE A NINCOMPOOP
TEE-HEE, I VILL COMPOSE VON VERE ADOLF AS SHOWED UP AS A FAT IGNORAMUS.
TEE-HEE, I VILL DRAW VON SHOWING VERE OSGAR ISS A PERVERSE NINCOMPOOP!
ART DEPT.

Abb. 16: In A.D. Condos Strip *Osgar refuses to be a Nincompoop* sind es die Figuren, die als Comic-Künstler auftreten – dabei aber wenig Erfolg haben.

Ausblick

Offenkundig ist die comictypische Verschiebung weg von kunstkritischen, satirischen Darstellungen zu mehr oder minder harmlosen Gags. Wie die hier beschriebenen Beispiele deutlich zeigen, geht es ihnen nicht primär darum, Künstler_innen oder Kunstwerke zu kritisieren, indem sie etwa als mit Blick auf die an sie gestellten sozialen, ökonomischen oder technischen Erwartungen gescheiterte Figuren inszeniert werden. Das Scheitern von Künstler_innen ist im Comic um 1900 vielmehr eines unter/von vielen möglichen Themen, welche die Leser_innen zum Lachen bringen sollen. Leicht verständliche Handlungsmuster und stereotype Figuren helfen dabei, dies zuverlässig zu realisieren. An Little Jimmys Begegnung mit dem Pleinairmaler lässt sich dies sinnfällig machen: Die Figur des Malers entspricht stereotypen Vorstellungen des Künstlers, die seit dem 19. Jahrhundert in Karikaturen verfestigt wurden und im Comic (wie in der Karikatur) hyperbolisiert werden: lange, wirre Haare, von der Mode abweichende Bekleidung (einschließlich herausstechender Hüte), exaltiertes Auftreten, das Streben nach Ruhm, technische bzw. ›künstlerische‹ Inkompetenz. Ebenso ist der Lausbube eine Figur, die seit dem mittleren 19. Jahrhundert tradiert ist. Ihre Motive müssen ebenso wenig erläutert und begründet werden wie die des Künstlers. Darüber hinaus ist das grundlegende Handlungsmuster bekannt: ein Künstler schafft ein Werk – stereotyperweise ein gemaltes Bild –, das er für sein Meisterwerk hält; es wird zerstört/ver-

fremdet/beschädigt; andere Figuren betrachten es in diesem ruinierten Zustand als Kunstwerk von unschätzbarem Wert. Der Scherz geht hier gleichermaßen auf Kosten des scheiternden Künstlers, der glaubt, ein zeitloses Werk schaffen zu können, wie auch auf die der vermeintlichen Kunstkenner_innen, die darin scheitern, das herkömmliche Werk als beschädigt zu erkennen. Zugleich lässt sich mit dem Sturz in den Keilrahmen hinein ein Slap-Stick-Gag in den Comic integrieren, der schon für sich genommen den zeitgenössisch an einen Comic gestellten Anspruch erfüllt: *komisch* zu sein. Vor der Etablierung und Ausdifferenzierung neuer, nicht primär humoristischer Comicgenres seit den 1920er Jahren, sind scheiternde Künstler_innen in Comicgeschichten häufiger anzutreffen als der erfolgreiche, weil ersterer viel leichter zum Gegenstand eines Scherzes gemacht werden kann.

Die im Vorangegangenen geschilderten Szenen und Aspekte decken bei Weitem nicht alle Varianten der Darstellung von scheiternden Künstler_innen im Comic um 1900 ab, doch sie geben einen Eindruck von ihrem Variantenreichtum. Eine eingehende Studie, die Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede der Darstellung von Künstler_innen in Karikaturen sowie Bildergeschichten europäischer Prägung und früher amerikanischer Comics herausarbeitet, bleibt einstweilen Desiderat. Sie verspricht Aufschluss zu geben über die Anknüpfungspunkte, welche die Autor_innen und Zeichner_innen von Comics um 1900 bei ihren Vorgänger_innen aus Europa suchen, und darüber, wie die vorgefundenen Themen, Darstellungsweisen, Figurentypen usw. im Comic aktualisiert und ggf. modifiziert werden, um der narrativen Form des Comics und seiner spezifischen Semiotik sowie den sich wandelnden Vorstellungen von Kunst und Künstler_innen angepasst zu werden.

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1] Mehrere ausfürhrlich dargestellte Beispiele medienspezifischer Transformationen finden sich in Bachmann [2018], sowie Bachmann 2017. Exemplarisch ist die Notwendigkeit, die nur angedeutete Handlung eines Einzelbild-Gags für seine Verwendung in einem Comic auf mehrere Panels aufzugliedern.

2] Da es sich überwiegend um männliche Figuren handelt, wird hier und im Folgenden das generische Maskulinum verwendet.

3] Bei den hier zitierten Comicseiten handelt es sich überwiegend um Digitalisate aus Internet-Zeitungsdatenbanken; ihre Scanqualität ist nicht immer gut und zum Großteil ver-

zichten sie darauf, die meist farbigen Comics in Farbe wiederzugeben. Originalseiten sind jedoch zumal in Deutschland schwer zu bekommen.

4] Hier kann nicht von einer differenzierten Darstellung psychischer Störungen ausgegangen werden, vielmehr von reduktiven populären Vorstellungen von ›Wahnsinn‹ als deviantem Verhalten, weshalb der allgemeinsprachliche Ausdruck bevorzugt wird.

5] Dem Verfasser ist kein weiteres Beispiel dafür bekannt. In diesem Zusammenhang stellt sich die grundsätzliche Frage nach der Darstellung psychischer Störungen im Comic um 1900. Es gibt Beispiele für das spontane Auftreten einer psychischen Störung als Pointe (so in Helen Stilwell: *Why Men Go Crazy on Merry Christmas Day.*) und gespielten ›Wahnsinn‹ (so in Gene Carr: *Mr. Al Most*), eine systematische Darstellung ist jedoch bislang Desiderat.

6] Über C. Deball ist lediglich bekannt, dass er/sie den vorliegenden Strip sowie mindestens einen weiteren gezeichnet hat (*Professor Middelkopf*), der 1907 im *Denison Review* (Denison, Iowa) erschienen ist. Möglicherweise handelt es sich um Clark Deball.

CLOSURE
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The List as a Means of Assessment and Standardization and Its Critical Remediation in Graphic Narratives About Illness and Care

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Introduction

This contribution aims to explore how patients and their caring relatives, but also doctors and clinical staff, experience moments of failure in contexts of illness and care and how these experiences are represented and reflected on in graphic illness narratives. Drawing on Brian Fies' *Mom's Cancer* (2006) and Roz Chast's *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (2014) this essay will analyze the expectations that shape the daily lives of patients and caregivers alike and the feelings of failure that result when things turn out differently.

The specific challenges of caring are deeply connected to the complex interplay of autonomy and relationality. Caring constellations are extremely demanding situations in which the care for another person and the care for the self have to be balanced. This demands that both individual needs and the needs of the other have to be considered and responded to.

The interrelationality and interdependence typical for care relationships can be shown extremely well in the comics medium, where the communication of meaning relies on the mutual enrichment of words and images, panels and gutters and the dynamic interplay of the semiotic resources in the page layout. Another reason why the comics form lends itself particularly well to the representation of illness is its ability to »put […] the body on the page« (Chute 2010, 10). Through words and non-verbal expressions, postures and gestures, graphic illness narratives function as a »bold visual assertion of embodiment and … vulnerability« (DeFalco 2016, 225). Additionally, comics as a hand-drawn form constantly emphasizes the subjective bodily mark on the page. As a consequence, the visual narrative on the page is never dissociated from the body of the artist. Graphic illness narratives stress the subjective quality of bodily suffering and thus oppose and critically comment on the clinical standardization of patients' experiences and needs.

The hand-drawn bodies and the often messy page layouts that emphasize individual suffering stand in stark opposition to another – neatly ordered and rather systematic – form of representation that appears suspiciously often in graphic narratives about illness: the list. One reason for its surfacing in illness narratives might be the fact that lists play an important role in medical contexts: medical history files, clinical checklists and therapy schedules not only shape the clinical everyday, but, arguably, deeply influence the physicians' perspectives on their patients.

Apart from its role as a practical tool in clinical contexts, the frequent surfacing of lists in graphic illness narratives also has to be considered from a literary and from a cultural point of view that takes into account the significance of lists and listmaking as a cultural constant and that pays close attention to the formal characteristics of the list. As we will see, the list is characterized by a great transformability, or, as Eva von Contzen has highlighted (2017, 318), by its *affordance*[1]: the list has an immense spectrum of possible uses, purposes and applications. Originally invented or created to keep track of transactions, the list was born of the needs of accounting and administration (cf. Goody 1977).

To characterize the form of the list and to conceptualize its potential meanings and effects in the context of graphic narratives, I will rely on the work of scholars from different disciplines. Narratologist Monica Fludernik defines a list as »a structural schema of enumeration in which particular items (e.g., attributes, objects or people, processes, actions) are arranged in a series« (2016, 309). She further differentiates four types of lists: the narrative list (which lists actions), the descriptive list (a descriptive passage in the form of the list), the argumentative list, and the list as insert (quotation of shopping list or embedded text that shows a bestseller list etc.). Fludernik's conceptualisation of the list – informed by her perspective as a literary scholar – focusses on the syntactic structure and the function of a list in a verbal text. In the graphic novels discussed in this essay we can find all four different types depicted by Fludernik. Still, the typology seems too limited to grasp the full range of lists that we can find in the corpus. As graphic novels rely on communication via words and pictures, the question arises why a series of named items arranged in a series should be called a list, while a series of shown items arranged in a series should not. Fortunately, the same question has already been addressed by the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco. In his collection *The Infinity of Lists* (2009)[2] Eco includes both textual and visual lists (examples for the later range from Altdorfer's Renaissance painting *The Battle of Alexander* (1529) to a photograph that shows a bird's eye view of Los Angeles by night (cf. Eco 2009, 16, 242f.). For Eco the list is characterized by an oscillation between form-giving and infinity or, as he calls it, »a swing between ›everything included‹ and the poetics of the ›etcetera‹« (ibid. 7). A further important distinction that we owe to Eco is the differentiation »between ›practical‹ or ›pragmatic‹ and ›poetic‹ lists (and by the latter term [he] mean[s] any artistic end for which the list was proposed and whatever art form is used to express it)« (Eco, 113). This differentiation is very important in

the context of this essay as it highlights how the practical lists (to-do-lists, how-to instructions, and medical checklists) are picked-up and remediated in the poetic lists.

I intentionally use the concept of remediation to underline my ambition to uncover the logic of the list. Thus, I bring a term from media studies to the study of a form. David Bolter and Robert Grusin, authors of the collected volume *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), refer to remediation as »the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms« (273). This also happens here with the list form: The millennia-old tradition and daily cultural practice of listmaking is reproduced and commented on in the comics medium.

The remediation of the practical lists in the poetic lists makes visible the significance of the form itself. Sociologist Urs Stäheli pointedly addressed this observation when he stated that »a list produces a reality of its own – it is seen as self-evident and clean fact where the traces of its production have become invisible« (2016, 15). Stäheli emphasizes that lists exert social power, especially so as their selection criteria and their principles of ordering are often arbitrary, or at least not visible. I will show in how far the list's reproduction and remediation in the comics medium serves to illuminate the cultural practices and the power structures that it is indicative of and that it relies on.

Remarkably, the list shares many poetic features with graphic narratives. As a very reduced and fragmentary form of narrative, lists offer plenty of gaps and voids to be filled in by the readers (and viewers). It is especially the list's fragmented form that consists of presences and absences (what is mentioned and what is not mentioned) that draws its readers in. As a poetic form threaded through with absences, the list offers a marked space for the imagination to enter (and this is also typical for the comics medium). As the readers have to cooperate in the process of meaning making, the list triggers a unique narrative empathy which Susanna Keen defines as »the sharing of feeling and perspective taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition« (Keen, 2013). In a recent article on »Experience, Affect, and Literary Lists« von Contzen has convincingly shown that lists in literary narratives connect readers to the narrative not only on a cognitive level, but also on a bodily-perceptional, an emotional and a cultural level (von Contzen, 2018, 319).

This essay aims to show how the practical lists, which stem from the discourses of self-optimization, economic stocktaking, scientific classification and standardized evaluation, are remediated in graphic illness narratives. The works explored in this essay show how the supposedly objective and documentary tool of the list is re-used and re-interpreted in the hand-drawn and deeply subjective narratives of personal, often traumatic, experiences of illness. The remediation of the list in the graphic illness narratives discussed transforms the form of the list from a practical instrument that is complicit in the suffering person's effacement into a poetic instrument of articulation and criticism, or, as Hillary Chute calls it, a »form of counterinscription« (Chute 2016, 4).

List-Making as a Tool of Self-Examination and the Gendered Ideals of Self-Assessment

Liam Cole Young characterizes listing activities as »the infrastructure of culture« and argues that they »help us glimpse the techniques and technologies by which human societies administer, police and imagine themselves« (Young 2018, 10). Furthermore, listing activities are not only a longstanding technique in administering societies, but also with regard to controlling and evaluating one's own feelings and actions. As Philippe Lejeune explains in his monograph *On Diary* (2009), it was the form of the account book that acted as »an inspiration or model for the less financial and more personal journals that people began keeping of their ›other properties‹ in the modern era« (51). He provides an example from religious journals that were kept by girls in the nineteenth century. They »were laid out like account books. They use one page for each week and one line for each day with two columns, one marked ›V‹ for victories (over the Devil) and the other marked ›D‹ for defeats, with the total at the bottom« (ibid).

Lejeune's examples emphasize the diachronic significance of the list form as a tool for a daily and binary stocktaking of failure and success. The list provides the means and the method for the self-disciplined endeavor to optimize daily actions and to effectively strive towards the best possible results. It is therefore no coincidence that the list as a written but simultaneously short and concise form is chosen as the ideal medium for those who want to keep track of their virtues and transgressions.

Listmaking as a means of ambitious self-perfection also has a long tradition in American autobiographical writing, its most prominent representative being »the first American« (cf. Brands 2000), namely Benjamin Franklin. In the second part of his *Autobiography* (Franklin, 2004), the born Calvinist describes how he set out to »the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection« (Franklin, 68). To this aim, he invented a peculiar method. He created a list of thirteen virtues which he used as points of departure to carefully examine his behavior and control his self.[3] Then he constructs a catalog in which he marks »by a little black spot every fault he found upon examination« (Franklin, 70). In this way Franklin documents each individual failure that impedes the supposed progress of his moral development and thus puts an example to the nation. Franklin's list serves as a seismograph of personal failure and how he overcomes it and it radiates a spirit of efficiency and self-determination. Another list-like form he uses for time optimization and to maximize his effectiveness is his daily schedule. Franklin's personal schedule is characterized by a neat binarism of work and sleep that is only interrupted by eating and the managing of his accounts. All concerns on behalf of the needs of others, not to speak of taking care of anything or somebody apart from his own self and business, are conspicuously absent from his daily routines.

Obviously, both, the daily self-examinations (a form that looks back on the performance of the past self) and the schedule (which plans the ideal performance of the future self) are governed by specific personal ideals which are inextricably connected to cultural ideals. While the religious journals introduced by Lejeune demonstrate an

endeavor to live a life pleasing to God, Franklin's lists of self-examination and his daily schedule showcase an entrepreneurial spirit that especially aims at the economization of all spheres of life.

In this tradition of list-based accounting Roz Chast presents us with the fictive »to-do« list of her childhood, we easily grasp that the maxims dominating her ideal performance are neither governed by moral perfection nor by self-perfection, but by a strong attempt to please her parents (Fig. 1).

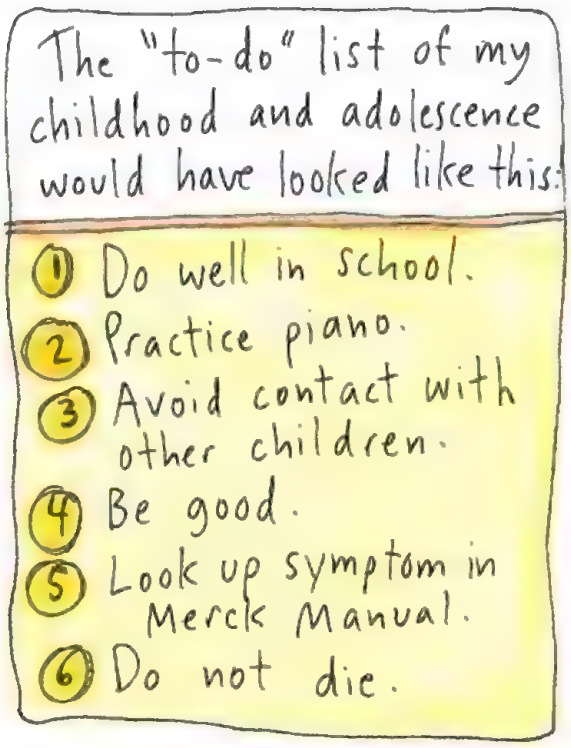
The "to-do" list of my childhood and adolescence would have looked like this:
1 Do well in school.
2 Practice piano.
3 Avoid contact with other children.
4 Be good.
5 Look up symptom in Merck Manual.
6 Do not die.

Fig. 1: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Chast, 11).

Doing well in school, practicing the piano and avoiding contact with other children: these are not a child's self-chosen tasks for the day. The imperative constructions »Look up symptom in Merck Manual« and »Do not die« speak of the various anxieties and preoccupations of her parents and the overprotective education Roz had to endure.

After an accumulation of tragic events in their earlier lives, Roz's parents (a rather aged Jewish couple of Russian descent) are more interested in security than in social advancement and settle down into a quiet and modest life in a small apartment in Brooklyn. The Chasts' ambitions are not controlled by economic success (»The concept of ›looking for something better‹ or ›being happy‹ – that was for modern people or movie stars. I.e., degenerates«; CWT, 7), but by the stronger imperative of staying alive and keeping away from danger. Roz describes her father as »chain-worried the way others might chain-smoke: he never learned to drive, swim, ride a bicycle or change a lightbulb« (CWT, 28). She adds that her own childhood was surrounded by »cautionary' tales« (CWT, 29) that strictly kept her away from sports, parties and friends: »I had no nostalgia for any carefree days of youth, because I never had them« (CWT, 11). These quotes also explain why her to-do list is somewhat similar to a package insert that lists the risks and side effects of a drug, in this case: life itself.

The ›to-do-list‹ of her childhood combines not only two temporal levels (the past-experiencing childhood-I and her fear of failing her parents vs. the present adult cartoonist who describes little Roz's childhood via the poetic remediation of the to-do list), but also two levels of communication: the poetic remediation of the practical form in a literary context distills and visualizes the hitherto unarticulated fears and restrictions of the child. Via choosing a form that is associated with duties to be ticked-off, the cartoonist communicates the

child's pressure to gratify the expectations of the parents and her aspiration to be a ›good daughter‹. The fictive ›to-do-list‹ of her childhood serves to express, to distill and to visualize the standards and criteria which the adult Roz perceives to have dominated the young Roz's performance as a daughter.[4]

Representing her childhood in the form of the to-do list, Chast allows her readers to immediately experience the pressures and restrictions she had to live up to as a child. As Eva von Contzen argues with regard to the experientiality of the list, »the very form of the list resonates with the reader's own experiences of list-making« (2018, 317). This is why the to-do list of her childhood creates an immediacy that successfully bridges the gap between the adult cartoonist and the child's experience; it allows us »to relate not only to the protagonist's feelings, but also to the form through which these experiences and feelings are transmitted« (318). As a consequence, the reader instinctively combines both: the child's exposedness to the parents' expectations, and the adult's anger that transforms the child's to-do list into a list of reproaches.

After art school, Roz begins to work as a cartoonist for *The New Yorker* and other well-known magazines and enjoys living in the suburbs with her own family. She provides us with a list of nouns, an argumentative list in Fludernik's sense, that explains why she »had not set foot in Brooklyn once« between 1990 and 2001: »Denial, avoidance, selfishness, laziness, and the day-to-day busyness of my life (two little kids/cartoon deadlines/grocery shopping!)« (CWT, 11). Strikingly, her self-analysis communicates in how far she perceives her absence from home as not only an unavoidable consequence of her occupational situation and her private circumstances but also as a moral failure (selfishness, laziness). Her absence from her place of birth seems to stand in striking contrast to the aforementioned »Be good«, the

Fig. 2: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Chast, 16).

fourth ›commandment‹ on her childhood list. This might very well be the reason why the prevalent feeling (next to dread and claustrophobia) upon entering her childhood home after many years is »guilt« (CWT, 13).

That Roz still perceives herself to be responsible for her parents becomes obvious by her immediate reaction to the greasy dirt she finds everywhere in their apartment: She takes up a sponge and starts cleaning (Fig. 2). The halo, the smiling face, the speech balloon that suggests that she happily sings while cleaning, and the trademark ›Perfect Daughter‹ – that might either refer to the cleaning product or to Roz – ironically stage an idealized image of a contemporary ›Angel in the House‹.

Roz is shown as living in a culture that conceptualizes women, especially daughters and mothers, as (selfless) carers. The list of her daily chores (»two little kids! cartoon deadlines! grocery shopping!«; CWT, 11) portrays her everyday life as characterized by a high degree of care work which has to be balanced with her professional career. Thus, Roz's to-do-lists, those from childhood and those from adulthood, represent the gendered »contrast between a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connections, between a self measured against an abstract ideal of perfection and a self assessed through particular activities of care« (Gilligan, 35). According to the American social psychologist Carol Gilligan, femininity is associated with care, comfort, and concern for others (Gilligan, 20). Caring for her aged parents draws her back into a relationality which she has cut short years ago to get free from the heteronomy generated by her parents' demands and fears.

Against the simplifying assumptions of ethics of care philosophers who idealistically theorize care as »a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility« (Brenner et al, 1996, xiii), Roz Chast's graphic narrative fosters the understanding that care relationships – especially those between parents and children – are never free from their embeddedness in familial backgrounds and the past history of the individuals and their experiences with each other. Roz's to-do lists serve to express her ambivalent position as a caring daughter who needs to find a way to balance her independence and autonomy with the contrasting demands of responsibility and care.

Ultimately, Roz Chast confronts her readers with one of the central concerns of ethics, namely »What is one's obligation to other people, friends, family, strangers? And what is one's obligation to oneself?« (DeFalco, 2016a, 4). By describing her care work as »time-consuming, expensive and emotionally exhausting (CWT, 23), Roz puts it in direct contrast to time optimization and the striving for effectiveness which is not only expressed in Franklin's list, but which is also inscribed into the form of the to-do list itself. Through her remediation of the practical to-do list as a means to show a daughter's commitment and consideration towards her parents, Chast meaningfully contrasts the aspiration for self-development and self-determination with relationality and the demands of care work.

The List as a Means to Negotiate the Idealized Conceptions of Care with the Daily Realities of Care Work

The ideals of care, at least the way in which they are described in ethics of care philosophy, are rather high. Sarah Miller describes care as a »morally appropriate reaction to another's needs« (2005, 142) and Brenner et al. characterize care relationships as devoted to »assisting others to cope with their weaknesses while affirming their strengths« (xiii). As these quotes serve to exemplify, care as a (philosophical) concept builds up standards of behavior and attitude that are far from the actual challenges of care work. As a consequence, care-givers, who try to live up to these standards, will often make the experience of failed caregiving.

As the following examples demonstrate, these feelings of failure can be connected to many areas. Roz as a care-giver reflects on failing emotionally (as she might feel the wrong emotions), in terms of management (because she loses track of the many numbers, details and tasks she has to coordinate) and in terms of commitment (because she anxiously notes the high cost of terminal long term care). Strikingly, to show her dilemmas, the cartoonist again falls back on the evaluative form of the list.

When both her parents are over ninety and the list of their ailments gets longer (»My mother's were mainly physical (high blood pressure, arthritis, digestive ailments …) my father's were mental (increased senile dementia)«), Roz decides to visit them more often and to give in to »the task of dealing« (CWT, 61). She takes care of providing a safe and decent heater, brings groceries, arranges for a meeting with a lawyer to manage their financial and legal affairs, persuades them to go to the hospital when they really need to, gets them home again and arranges for help, and she endures her father's »encroaching senility« (CWT, 70) when he stays at her home for some weeks.

The responsibilities of the daughter as caretaker are nicely summarized in the enumeration of the contents of the notebook that Roz uses to collect all the facts and figures which she needs to manage her care work (Fig. 3).

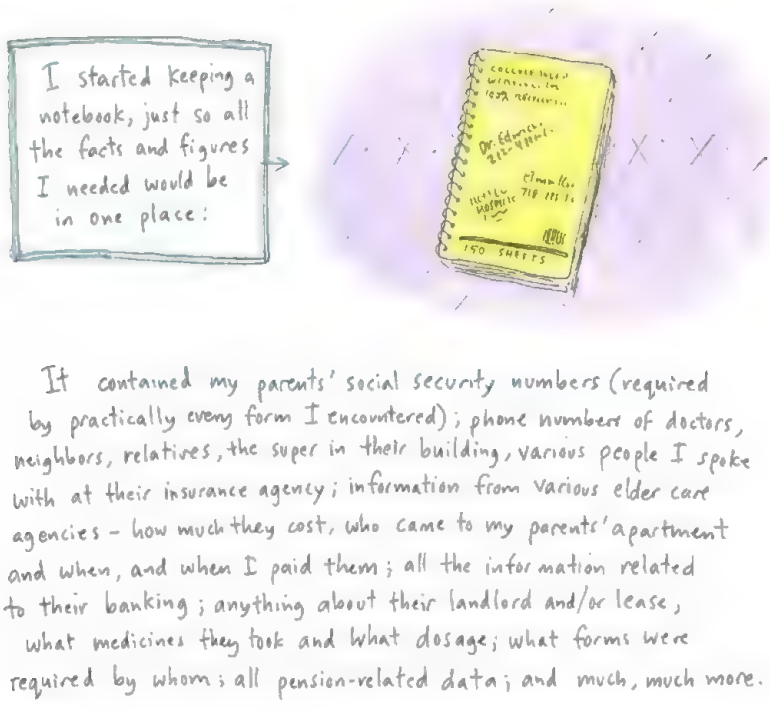
I started keeping a notebook, just so all the facts and figures I needed would be in one place:
150 SHEETS
It contained my parents' social security numbers (required by practically every form I encountered); phone numbers of doctors, neighbors, relatives, the super in their building, various people I spoke with at their insurance agency; information from various elder care agencies – how much they cost, who came to my parents' apartment and when, and when I paid them; all the information related to their banking; anything about their landlord and/or lease, what medicines they took and what dosage; what forms were required by whom; all pension-related data; and much, much more.

Fig. 3: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Chast, 85).

Even though this list is from an early state of the care relationship and rather illuminates the bureaucratic side of it, it empha-

sizes the excessive demands Roz feels regarding the situation that caught her rather off guard. The comments box which announces her decision is neatly framed and has clear, defined limits to stress the idea that »all the facts and figures I needed would be in one place« (85). The following unframed panel that represents the notebook, which is completely scribbled over with notes, implies that the amount of information is exuberant and overwhelming. The fact that the list ends with a semicolon that is combined with the indefinite numerals »and much, much more« hints at the perceived infinity of things to do. By writing every detail into a notebook, Roz tries to give a frame and a form to the perceived complexity. Her notebook thus becomes an example of the oscillation between form-giving and infinity which Eco defined as the defining feature of list-likeness (»a swing between ›everything included‹ and the poetics of the ›etcetera‹«; 7).

Even though Roz finally accepts her role as a carer, the care relationship between Roz and her parents is by no means an easy one. »I wasn't great as a caretaker and they weren't great at being taken care of« (CWT, 16). Repeatedly, Roz feels like a failure as a caregiver: after she swears at her father she admits »I was not proud of my behavior […] // Taking care of my father didn't bring out the best in me« (CWT, 75f.). She later wonders what she could »possibly have been thinking« (CWT, 89) when she left her parents alone in the apartment directly after her mother came home from hospital. As the relationship to her mother has been extremely complicated and difficult since her early childhood, Roz »resented taking care of her« (CWT, 141). The daughter explains that she has never been close to her mother, they were not friends. Still, she relates that she feels »guilty not to be ›doing the dirty work‹ [her]self« (CWT, 184).

The following list of the dos and don'ts of a caring daughter pointedly draws the reader's attention to Roz's inner strife. The table is positioned at the end of a chapter in which the daughter takes stock of her relationship with her parents, her performance as a care-giver and of the shrinking budget that is constantly decreasing (Fig. 4).

GALLANT AND GOOFUS:
THE DAUGHTER-CARETAKER EDITION
Has forgiven her parents for all the transgressions of her youth, which she now knows were committed out of love.
Is still seething with resentment about crap that happened forty years ago.
Treasures the time spent with her parents, because she knows that soon, they'll be gone.
Mostly, when with her aged parents, wishes she were somewhere else.
Doesn't worry about the money, because if it runs out, she would be thrilled to have them come live with her!
The idea of her parents living under her roof makes her want to lie down and take a very, very, very, very, very, very long nap.

Fig. 4: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Chast, 146).

This table is set up in the binary fashion of a mental game that lists pros and cons. As the headline implies, the two columns – one listing 'good' behavior, the other listing 'bad' behavior – are stylized according to the didactic and moralizing American children's comic *Goofus and Gallant*. Published from the 1940s onwards, the archetypical characters of Goofus and Gallant were designed to teach children to differentiate good and bad moral behavior (cf. Mills 2014). By representing two versions of her own comic avatar – one with a halo and one with horns – Chast implies that in this table we can read two simplified and binary versions of her attitude towards her dependent parents. Depending on the reading direction, we either receive her as oscillating between the two versions (horizontal reading) or as presenting two directly opposed character traits (vertical reading) that might contrast the ›ideal carer‹ drawn in the idealized description of theory of care philosophy and her actual affective response to the demands of care-work. The thick green line separating the right column from the left column suggests the second reading. The contrasting columns of the table, each listing three attitudes, draw attention to the simplification and decontextualization that is inherently attached to the practice of listmaking. As a result, lists and tables become visible as a schematic and simplified representation of reality that can help to order thoughts and ideas; they are, however, separated from reality.

The contrastive list is simultaneously a humorously simplified and a strong hyperbolic version of Roz' inner conflict. The tabular list that is fashioned according to the effective didactics of *Goofus and Gallant* builds on an uncritical assumption of right and wrong. It reflects on the list as means of binary construction that reduces reality into systematized options of right and wrong. It thus draws our attention to the fact that the practical list is an abstract form that works best when it is separated from real contexts. It is a form that is qualified for binaries, for demarcation and for accounting. This is also why this list is positioned at the end of the chapter: it is disembedded from the series of the other panels and claims a page for itself.

The List As a Medium to Negotiate the Cost-Benefit Ratio of Terminal Care and the Absurd Impossibility of Valuing a Human Life

The challenges of care and care work take relatives not only to their physical and emotional, but also to their financial limits. Roz Chast discusses this fact with a somewhat shocking candour. She represents Roz in the act of calculating the costs and describes her as estimating the time she will be able to afford terminal care. Thus, this chapter returns to the practice of account keeping – this time not in the sense of self-examination but rather as an examination of the value of human life. By drawing on the form of the list, the highly sensitive issue of the supposedly appropriate costs of terminal care is represented in an irrevocable lucidity while

the question is simultaneously addressed in its absurdity as the value of human life evades financial calculations.

After an interval of hospice care and what seemed to be the last days for her dying mother, Roz suddenly finds her restored, sitting on the couch with her private nurse, eating a tuna-sandwich. Roz's reaction is rather unaffectionate. »I knew that her retreat from the abyss should have filled me with joy, or at least relief. However, what I felt when I saw her was closer to »Where, in the five stages of death, is eating a tuna sandwich?« (CWT, 176). Roz' reaction not only serves to show that she is physically and emotionally worn down and therefore has started to accept her mother's impending death, but also, that she has internalized Kübler-Ross' list of stages of dying (cf. Kübler-Ross 1970) and now expects her mother »to die on schedule« (Couser 1997, 31). Apart from these explanations, however, her frustration is also related to the fact that she experiences financial trouble because the terminal care of her parents costs a lot of money. While Roz is rather clueless as to how she can afford to keep her parents »housed, fed, safe and comfortable« (CWT, 144), the cartoonist offers the readers a witty remediation of the list as it frequently appears in self-help literature (Fig. 5).

HOW TO PREPARE FOR VERY, VERY ADVANCED OLD AGE
Make sure to scrimp and save every penny of your precious earnings.
DENTED CANS
Believe in deferred pleasure!
O.K., Mr. Hanratty! Time to change your Depends!
And when your scrimpings run out:
1 Go into your children's scrimpings, and/or
2 Play and win the lottery, and/or
3 Apply for a Guggenheim, and/or
4 Start smoking, and/or
5 Take hemlock.

Fig. 5: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Chast, 149).

Fashioned in the verbal style of self-help literature (how-to instruction), the tripartite panel structure reminds the reader of a tryptich. And indeed, the three panels are variants of the same theme: the absurdity of self-help culture in contexts of vulnerability and dependency. Reading the panels from left to right, the reader realizes that the proportion of visual language decreases. The first advice, which might still seem relevant for a preparation of old-age, is only slightly ridiculed by the accompanying picture that shows a well-dressed old lady who buys second-quality products (dented cans) to save money. In the second panel the proportion of verbal language increases and so does the level of irony. This time, the advice is combined with an interrogation mark, which makes it stronger and highlights the imperative style of self-help literature. To tell a very old person to believe in »deferred pleasure« is even in itself an inept remark as there is not really a lot of time left to defer anything to. The combination of the verbal advice with the picture that shows an emphatically cheerful nurse wearing rubber gloves to finally deal with the old person's fecal incontinence further underlines the absurdity of the self-help idea for people who can no longer help themselves but are dependent on others (When you cannot solve your problems you at least have to stay positive!). Strikingly, the old person is no longer represented in the second panel at all. Mr Hanratti is invisible, a status typical for those who depend on the help of others. Finally, the third panel of the tryptich gathers a bunch of desperate measures to take against total (financial) dependence and bankruptcy. The to-do list, usually a means to structure one's challenges and order one's tasks with the aim of efficiency and self-perfection is finally rendered as an absurd and desperate attempt to take control over issues that cannot be controlled.

I felt like a disgusting person, worrying about the money. But it was hard not to, especially when I thought about what this "extra care" might cost.
MINUSES: Rent, "personal support" plan, "concierge doctor" plan, rent for still-not-vacated Brooklyn apartment, cable, phone, laundry, community fee, furniture, medication, sundries... plus "extra care"... $15 per hour... 20 hours a week x 4 = $1,200 more per month.....
PLUSES: Mom's pension, Dad's pension... social security... savings.
HOW MANY MORE YEARS???

Fig. 6: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Chast, 145).

When a lot of unexpected costs arise because apart from the rent for the nursing home, Roz has to order »extra help« via an outside agency and special medications etc., her financial worries add to her feeling of guilt: »I felt like a disgusting person worrying about the money« (CWT, 145) (Fig. 6).

We see her sitting in front of a piece of paper, drawing a chart to take stock of the revenues and expenditure, the minuses and pluses. Roz looks exhausted and at a loss. The crumpled pieces of papers shown on the table suggest that the list in front of her is already her sixth attempt to get an overview of the private finances. And in the thought bubble arising from the protagonist's head we read – like a total at the bottom of a bill – her ultimate concern »How many more years?« (CWT, 145). The elliptically formulated question has various possible connotations: It expresses the daughter's financial concern. But it implicitly also shows the degree to which the individual challenges, shortcomings and failures of caregiving are embedded in the deeply ethical question: What's the value of a human life?

Contrary to the practices of calculating, stocktaking and accounting, Roz finally expresses her own way to bestow value on her mother. While her mother withers away, Roz visits her regularly and starts to write down all the rather obscure stories her mentally deranged mother tells her: about her dreams, her disrupted memories and her daily life in the nursing home. Through the act of listening to her mother's stories and the subsequent writing down of these narratives, she finds a unique way to care for her mother in the sense that caring expresses ethically significant ways in which we matter to each other, »transforming interpersonal relatedness into something beyond ontological necessity and brute survival« (Bowden, 1).

Fig. 7: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Chast, 220).

Eventually, during her mother's last days and even after she has passed away, Roz begins to draw her (»I was alone with my mother's body for a while. I drew her. I didn't know what else to do. I had been drawing her all summer, since the conversations had been reduced to almost nothing«; CWT, 210). All in all, there are twelve individual hand-drawings that are similar in style and

yet very different with regard to perspective. At the moment of drawing, the relationship between mother and daughter somewhat disappears or dissolves. What is left in these moments of close observation and detailed recording is a dialogue between two human beings, one who is just there and the other who tries to give that person a form and a memory, an expression and a sense of concreteness and of presence that will survive that person's death.

By drawing her mother (Fig. 7), Roz eventually succeeds in transforming her perceived failure as a caregiving daughter into an act of responsiveness. She finds her unique way of stating that her mother matters to her. Closely observing her face, her facial expressions, her breathing, her exhaustion and by eventually putting her mother's changing bodily expressions down on paper through her own hands is a way to care for the other beyond the ordinary standards of keeping her »housed, fed, safe and comfortable« (CWT, 144). By drawing her, the daughter makes her visible – as an old and dying person.

In contrast to the self-help tryptichon examined above, these portrayals neither marginalize nor hide old age and dying. On the contrary, the twelve drawings of her mother's last days at the end of the book (before the epilog) give the old and dying body center stage. Furthermore, the twelve drawings are very individual and each show a very unique posture, expression, mood and perspective on her mother's dying body. The triptychon, in contrast, just referred to old age as a uniform stereotype (»Time to change your depends!«, 149). The drawings at the end of the book are beyond stereotype. Contrary to the list that tries to reduce plurality into a standardized form, the series of drawings at the end of the book reverses this process: it shows that infinity can be found in one individual face.

Medicine as the Administration of Bodies by Lists

While the analysis so far concentrated on the (poetic) list as a means to critically engage with the diachronic significance of the (practical) list in contexts of accounting, stock taking and self-evaluation and explicated how its invisible and unarticulated ideals of effectivity, self-optimization and cost-benefit-ratio clash with the realities of terminal care, the second part of the essay specifically concentrates on lists in the context of medicine. Even though Brian Fies' graphic memoir *Mom's Cancer* also describes the failures experienced by the relatives of a severely ill person, it especially highlights how patients' experiences are ›medicalized‹ by clinical lists.

Medical lists work as a tool to collect observations, to evaluate physical reactions and to plan future therapeutic options (or the future availability of the hospital bed still occupied at the moment). I aim to show how the remediation of the list serves to illuminate in how far medical discourse – the charts, the neatly listed data, and the checklists – translates the

disease, the care of the ill person and arguably the sick persons themselves into a discourse in which they are controllable and ›manageable‹.

In *Mom's Cancer*, Californian writer and cartoonist Brian Fies tells the story of his mother's struggle with metastatic lung cancer that spread to her brain. Before its publication as a hardcover edition in 2006, *Mom's Cancer* was anonymously posted as a webcomic from 2004 onwards that had a far reaching online audience. Eventually, in 2005 it won the Eisner Award in the newly created category »Best Digital Comic«. The discourses of failure in the context of illness are often hidden but universally present if we pay close attention – this seems to be one of Brian Fies's messages in this comic on his mother's illness. As a first example we might look at the supposedly funny panel that represents a parodistic remediation of the very popular American electronic toy called *Operation Game*. Walmart's advertisement of the game provides an impression of the course of the play: »Your patient Sam is feeling a bit under the weather. Can you ›operate‹ and make him better, or will you get the buzzer? Grab the tweezers and try with all of your might to take out all of his funny ailments« (https://www.walmart.com/ip/Operation-Game/24305176). The game instructions strikingly underline the pressure and the threatening attribution of failure involved in processes of healing. The implied message, which is communicated by the buzzer that rings out when the doctor-player made a mistake, is: if you cannot make him better, you failed. The panel further emphasizes that the experience of failure is already anchored in the practice of the supposedly harmless practice of a toy for children.

The second issue that captivates the reader's attention is, of course, the way in which the ill person is represented. The stylization of a cancer patient within the context of an electronic children's game serves as a bitter ironic remark on her treatment as a patient. She is rendered into a passive object that doctors can use to amusingly spend their time with and try their skills on. The fact that the buzzer is actually lighting up at the upper right-hand side of the panel further stresses that something is severely wrong in the way she is treated.

Strinkingly, her body is not only shown in the fashion of the popular electronic toy, but also dissected into parts. The panel suggests that Fies's mother is not treated as a full person, but as a body-object with dysfunctional or problematic parts. The catalogues of both symptoms and treatments not only allow the cartoonist to describe the complicated pathologies of her cancer in a very matter-of-fact fashion. They simultaneously highlight the ways in which medical lists and catalogues serve as a tool to structure and apparently control the contingency connected to severe illness. The list is thereby shown as a medical tool that bans the danger, the unknown and the potential chaos by the routine of accumulating test results, structuring observations, and naming possible treatments.

From the moment of her first diagnosis onwards, the patient's life is described and talked about in terms of listed bodily phenomena and listed measures to be taken. As a consequence, the patient's body is itemized, intersected and cut into pieces (Fig. 8).

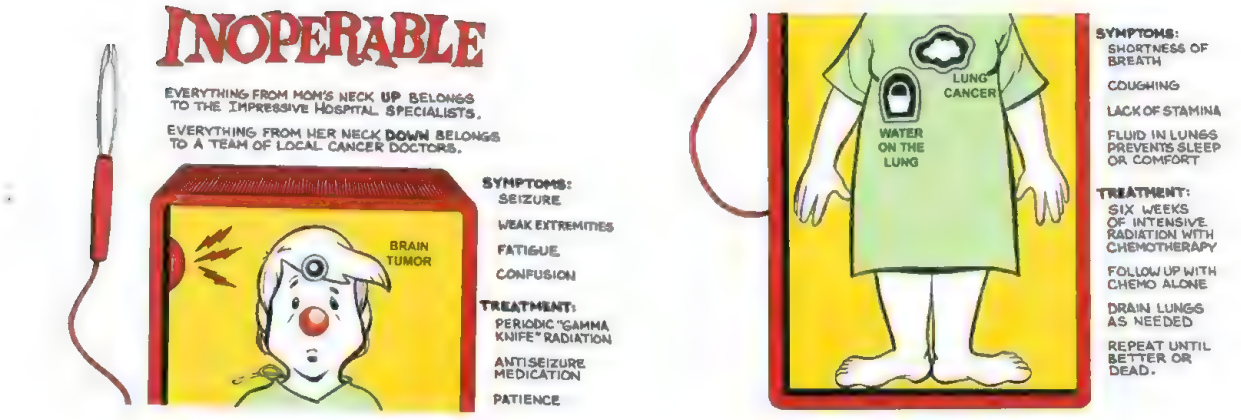

Fig. 8: *Mom's Cancer* (Fies, 12, 13).

The constant desire to conquer and control illness by means of vigorous activity also determines Brian, the son, and finds expression in his personal to-do list »There was only one thing to do when mom got ill: Read the books … find the resources … flip on the scary-smart switch I was too lazy to use most of the time … and cure cancer« (MC, 32). Of course, the laconic remark implicitly draws attention to the impossibility of the endeavour – still, to actually cure cancer would be the only possibility for the son to not feel as a failure with regard to his mother's suffering.

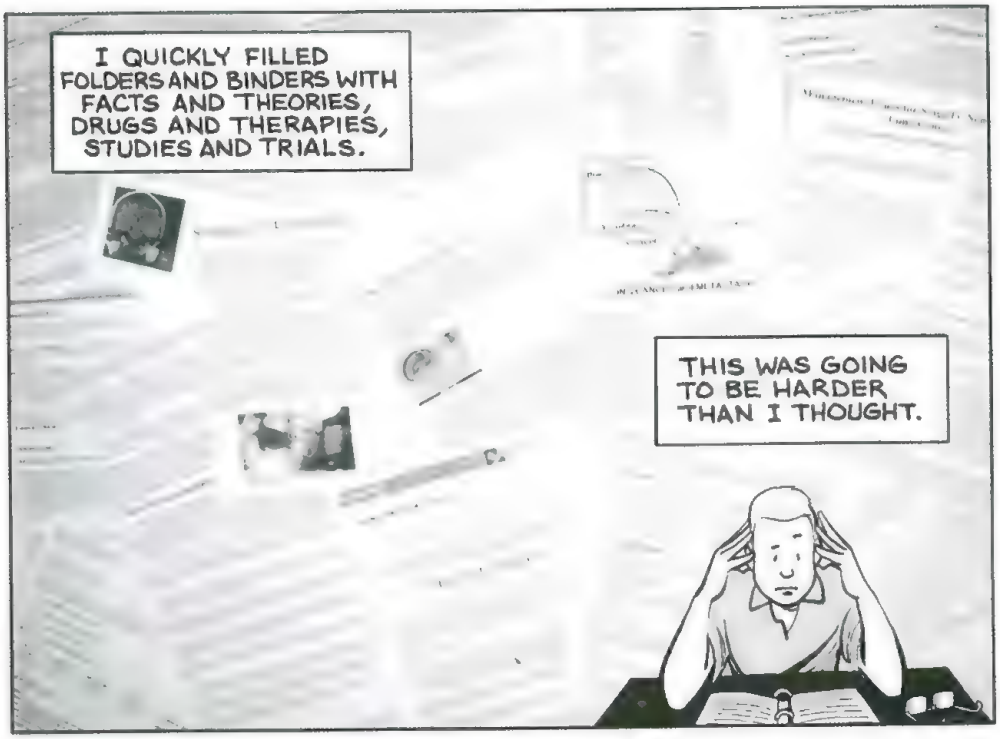
I QUICKLY FILLED FOLDERS AND BINDERS WITH FACTS AND THEORIES, DRUGS AND THERAPIES, STUDIES AND TRIALS.
THIS WAS GOING TO BE HARDER THAN I THOUGHT.

Fig. 9: *Mom's Cancer* (Fies, 24).

The sheer endless amount of printed papers (Fig. 9) – conspicuously not represented via drawings but as (reproductions of) photographed print-outs – may well be called a list in the sense of Eco's definition of the figurative list as a picture that suggests »an ›etcetera‹« (Eco 2009, 7). The fact that the accumulation of print-outs continues beyond the boundaries of the panel draws the reader's attention towards both the sheer endless amount of information that *can be found* on complex illnesses such as lung cancer and, also, to the possibly also endless amount of information that is still missing to ever be able to »cure cancer« (MC, 32). Thus, the photograph creates an impression of infinity and the great unknown of bodily illness.

According to Eco, a »closed form« such as a catalogue of symptoms and treatments usually indicates that somebody knows his world, knows its laws, causes and effects: »This is why he [is] able to *give it a form* (15, emphasis in original). As a consequence, medicine's use of forms, lists and catalogues serves to imply and communicate its knowledge of the causes, effects and laws of certain diseases and, connected to it, their mastery and control. In contrast, Brian's accumulation of unordered papers serves to describe his personal feeling of being overwhelmed and unable to control the mass of information and the complex nature of his mother's cancer. Brian cannot give it a form and this highlights his emotional and also his ›epistemological‹ chaos – he cannot fully grasp the laws and the causes of this illness. This is why his mode of representation – the pile of unordered papers – is opposed to the neat and ordered catalogues of medicine. The sheer number of papers put on the surface of a table (or on the floor) expresses the overwhelming infinity of information that could be found on the mother's illness and that, still, does not provide a complete understanding, a solution or a cure. And it also implies that the sheer infinity of information is too complex for Brian, the son: he fails to make sense of it. The chaotic bunch of papers is an example of a mode of representation originally opposed to Eco's catalogues: it implies that »we do not know the boundaries of what we wish to portray, [...] we do not know how many things we are talking about ... « (Eco, 15). However, ultimately, the practice of listing as such is very closely bound up with a perceived failure to fully grasp something: When »we cannot provide a definition by essence and so, to be able to talk about it, to make it comprehensible or in some way perceivable, we list its properties« (Eco, 15). Eco draws our attention to the fact that the list must not necessarily be a token of knowledge and order, of issues defined and recognized, but that the practice of list making can also be read as a sign of confusion, loss of control and epistemological uncertainty. Listing stands for »an imprecise image« (Eco, 18); it is an attempt to name as many properties as possible without being able to put them into definite structures and a coherent whole.

Eco creates awareness for the fact that listing is an ambiguous practice. On the one hand, it provides order and demonstrates mastery and understanding. On the other hand, however, the practice of listing stands for a preliminary attempt to represent and grasp something

that cannot (yet) be defined by essence. As a consequence, not only Brian's piled papers, but also medicine's neatly ordered lists can ultimately be read as a hint that his mom's cancer (its symptoms, its causes, its treatment, its further development) remains a mystery – not only to the son, but also to the doctors themselves. Via banning her illness, i.e. the parts of her body which are specifically affected by it, into neatly organized, classified and sectioned items on a list, medicine creates the illusion that illness can be transformed into something manageable and controllable while it ultimately still defies scientific understanding.

The Medical List as a Means to Objectify and Medicalize Human Suffering

As a natural science, medicine relies on classification and categorization to order and to possibly control natural objects and scientific phenomena. In clinical contexts, medicine's scientific approach, which is based on processes of listing and labelling, clashes with the emotional needs and the personal experiences of suffering patients. In this chapter I want to explore the way in which Brian Fies ›dialogises‹ the medical and the personal view on the suffering patient and how he uses the poetic remediation of the list form as a means to critically comment on medicine's tendency to transform patients into medical cases by the methods and measures of medical procedures.

After Brian has to give up on his first attempts to find his role as helper by investigating and possibly »cur[ing] cancer« (MC, 23), he laments on the options left for him. While »Kid Sis«, his younger sister, lives with his mother and is around her all the time, »Nurse sis«, a registered nurse, manages their mother's medication and watches her reactions. Compared with their expertise and effectiveness, Brian's list of supporting tasks seems rather desperate to him: »All I have to offer is this: I hold a valid driver's license and I know the way to the hospital. I can hang curtains, flip a mattress, load a dishwasher. I can deliver a pizza, lend a steadying arm, laugh at a morbid joke, and compliment a bad wig«; and he concludes »I doubt that's gonna be enough« (MC, 25). The reader ultimately asks himself: Enough for what? What is his measuring device for this conclusion? It seems that the ultimate measure for every gesture, every deed and every act of help finally is – if not to cure – then to save her from suffering. As this is not possible, the feeling of failure is shown to be always on the verge of entering his mind as a caring relative.

It is especially via the tableau on page 33 that the cartoonist expresses his feelings of shortcoming with regard to his mother's suffering. The simple headline »Arrangement in Grey and Black« evokes a comparison between Fies's representation of his mother (in her therapy armchair, dozed off and connected to an infusion bag that floods her body with chemicals) and James McNeill Whistler's oil painting with the same title from 1871. Whistler's painting that has repeatedly been described as an American icon (cf. MacDonald, 2003) shows Anna Whistler,

the painter's mother. With her pious black dress, her white bonnet, handkerchief and the white lace cuffs, the upright sitting lady radiates imperturbability, respectability and composedness. She sits on a chair which is posed on a platform. Though this platform might serve as a usual device for the practice of drawing portraits, the fact that Whistler's has chosen to represent it in his portrait implicitly creates the impression that he looks up at her: he glorifies her. And the effect did not go unnoticed by the audience. In 1934 a stamp was designed that reproduced the image with the words »In Memory and in Honor of the Mothers of America« (cf. MacDonald 2003). What does it mean that Fies provides a parodistic remediation of Whistler's mother in *Mom's Cancer*? Obviously, the dowdy, weak and sagging mother figure that Fies represents in his tableau forms a stark contrast to the seemingly unshakable woman shown in Whistler's portrayal. Especially the speech balloon that imitates the sleeping sounds of his mother provides the panel with a funny and comic undertone. The remediation of the Wheeler portrait suggests, among other things, that contemporary comic art seeks another form of realism: instead of realistic details that still give rise to an idealised version of womanhood and motherhood, it uses hyperbole to create a paradoxically realistic impression of human suffering.

The scene on the page does not provide the reader with any dialogues or comments that would express or represent the suffering and the hopelessness experienced in this moment. All we get is a catalogue of labels that are attached to the items that are arranged around her (Fig. 10).

The listed combination of the medical items and care aids (Chemotherapy: Taxolon tap, Carboplatin on deck, I.V. pump: 300ml/hr, misc. syringe, tissues, water bottles) with his mom's personal belongings that visualize her tastes and preferences (Strawberry Shake: Jack in the Box, large), and her individual past (Manzanita Walking Stick found in Oregon, whittled while camping in Alaska) creates a specific tension that shows how a perspective on his mom as a unique human being and a perspective that regards her mainly as a cancer patient conflict with one another.

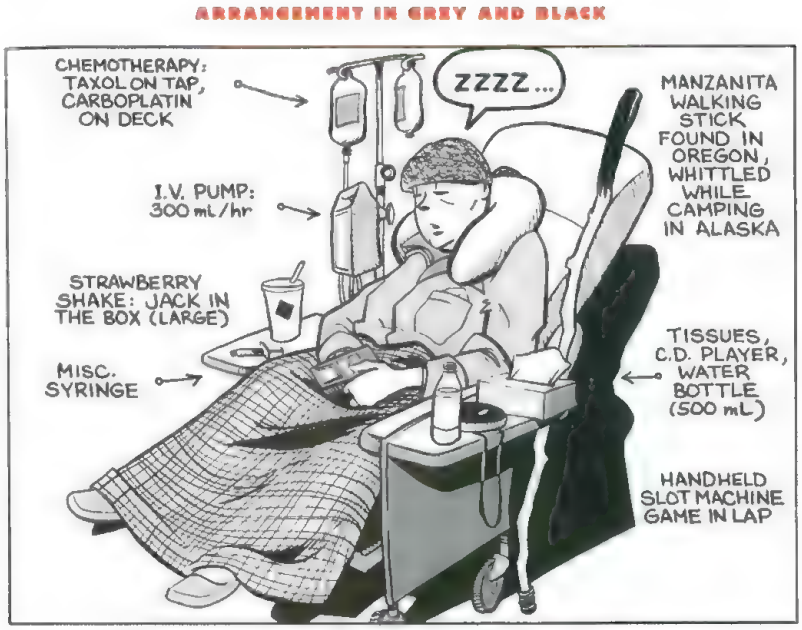
ARRANGEMENT IN GREY AND BLACK
CHEMOTHERAPY: TAXOL ON TAP, CARBOPLATIN ON DECK
ZZZZ...
MANZANITA WALKING STICK FOUND IN OREGON, WHITTLED WHILE CAMPING IN ALASKA
I.V. PUMP: 300 mL/hr
STRAWBERRY SHAKE: JACK IN THE BOX (LARGE)
MISC. SYRINGE
TISSUES, C.D. PLAYER, WATER BOTTLE (500 mL)
HANDHELD SLOT MACHINE GAME IN LAP

Fig. 10: *Mom's Cancer* (Fies, 33).

The practice of tagging has a long tradition in the natural sciences. Especially botanists used it in their herbaria to

assign names, habitats and dates to the plants they collected. Science historian Anke Te Heesen describes this process of labelling as a system of representation that finally resulted in a list-like notation and textualization of nature (cf. Te Heesen 2008, 108). Thus, labelling becomes visible as an appropriation of nature and shows the transformation of real objects into a standardized and universal expert language. The label is one of the basic tools of the classifying scientist (Te Heesen, 114). Its significance for an interpretation of this panel is further stressed by the label, which probably has her name on it, on the Strawberry Shake. The language of medicine is here shown to have appropriated suffering human beings by their very own expert language. Medicine's standardized and universal language might on the one hand be useful to create clarity, efficiency and security. On the other hand, however, it excludes those who are usually not privy to this language: the patients themselves. As a consequence, patients are excluded from the language that deals with their own bodies. Furthermore, the standardized labels stand in stark opposition to the subjective experiences and the individual clinical history which is embedded in the personal life story of the patient.

Ultimately, the remediation of the practice of scientific labelling critically comments on the fact that suffering patients are reduced to medical cases in clinical contexts. By combining tags that label personal objects with those tags that refer to medical instruments, the cartoonist successfully subverts medicine's standardized expert language and thus fosters a perspective on the patient that shows her as an individual human being with her very own history, tastes and coping strategies. By inverting and including the list as a poetic means of expression into his (mom's) illness memoir, Fies bears witness to his mother's traumatic experience as a patient and succeeds to »materially retrace« (Chute, 4) her inscriptional effacement. His reconstruction of her illness story from a personal (and not from the professional clinical vantage point) is therefore a »form of counterinscription« (Chute, 4).

The List as a Means to Measure Patients According to Standardized Expectations

Reading *Mom's Cancer*, it soon becomes clear that feelings of failure do not only play a role in the relatives' experiences, but also apply to the patient's life and emotions. Tellingly, the medical check-ups are called tests and examinations and the vocabulary recalling and evoking the field of valuation and assessment clearly indicates the pressure that is thereby exerted on the patient and her (ill) body's performance. Fies provides a condensed representation of his mother's »exams« (17) by confronting the reader with a series of fifteen small panel close-ups of varying body parts that are accompanied by fifteen imperatives voiced by the examiner: »Push«, »Balance«, »Pull«, »Resist«, »Hold«, »Follow my Finger«, »Breath«, »Down«, … (MC, 18) (Fig. 11).

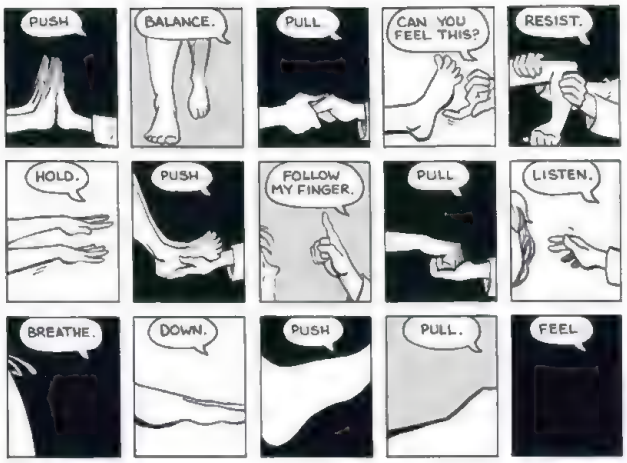

Fig. 11: *Mom's Cancer* (Fies, 18).

Obviously, the exams are very demanding and exhausting for his mother. The imperatives also reveal an attitude towards patients that fashions ill people undergoing the processes of diagnosis and treatment as human automata who have to perform and fulfil the medical personnel's expectations and give the best they can. This implicitly leads to the result that patients can also fail to perform well and, inextricably bound up with it, it also indicates that a disease, especially if it is not conquered or overcome, is interpreted as a lack of positive attitude and subsequent physical failure.

As the medical language is pervaded by metaphor and the verbs ›to conquer‹ and ›to overcome‹ clearly derive from the field of fighting and warfare, this language of activism and fight eventually creates the subliminal message that patients could »cure themselves by the mobilization of will« (Sontag, 57). If patients eventually fail to conquer illness and have to come to terms with the impending danger of death, new expectations and ›exams‹ in which the patient can either succeed or fail seem to be waiting. This is at least the message implied by the report card (Fig. 12).

The fact that the five stages of grief were also mentioned as a reference point in Chast's depiction of her mother's astonishing reinvigoration after she tested a new medication underlines the attention the theory receives not only by care workers but also by the public and how it shapes standardized expectations towards the process of dying. By confronting the reader with a fake report card that gives the ›student‹, that is the patient (in this case the protagonist's mom), grades in ›subjects‹ that derive from the well-known »five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance«[5] (MC, 88), the cartoonist highlights the absurdity of the patient's situation. Showcasing her grades that range from straight A's in *Denial* to F in *Acceptance* the comments box of the report card includes the line: »Student advised to graduate to Acceptance

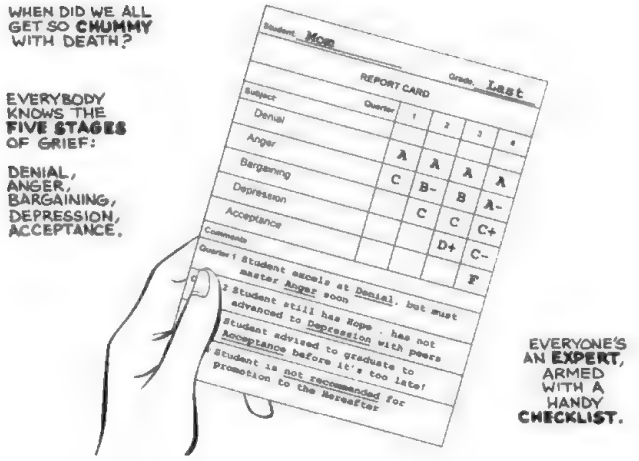

Fig. 12: *Mom's Cancer* (Fies, 88).

before it's too late« (ibid.). The record card not only serves as an ironic remark on the idea of measuring the process of dying, but, eventually, it draws attention to the role of the list form in contexts of assessment and evaluation.

In the said panel, the process of list making is unmasked as a means to measure people according to standardized expectations and thus, to construct social definitions of failure and success in situations that defy such conceptualizations. The comment »Everyone's an expert, armed with a handy checklist« (ibid.) directly remarks on the function of lists to (seemingly) control the uncontrollable via labels, measures of accomplishment and, inextricably connected to it, the expectation to manage and come to terms with the situation. Simultaneously, however, the comic self-reflexively foregrounds its own capacity to deal with illness in a much more sophisticated way than listmaking could. Through its remediation of the specific form of the report card, the panel also comments on a society whose values are – from elementary school onwards – unavoidably defined by success, performance, and the fulfilment of standardized expectations. The passage backs up what Belknap in his monograph *The List: The Uses and the Pleasures of Cataloguing* (2004) described as the list's function to »overmaster us« by implicitly remarking, »This is the way things are; we know« (Belknap, ix) and he goes on to explain: we can accept them »or make our own lists«.

Actually, the power of the social »we know« (how you should feel, behave – and ultimately – die) is further highlighted by the tableau on the following page that shows his mother in front of a graduation ceremony where everybody wears his or her doctor's hat while his bald-headed mother stands out from the crowd and in front of the graduation committee that refuses to hand her the completion certificate (Fig. 13).

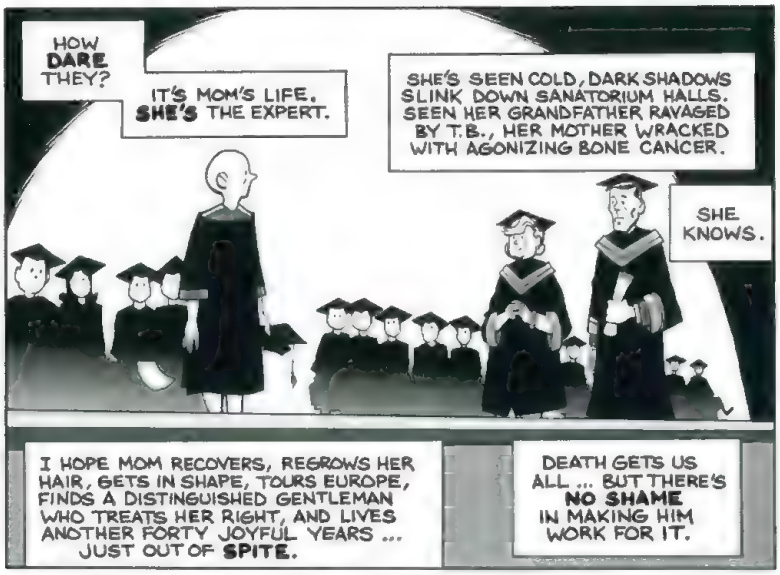
HOW DARE THEY?
IT'S MOM'S LIFE. SHE'S THE EXPERT.
SHE'S SEEN COLD, DARK SHADOWS SLINK DOWN SANATORIUM HALLS. SEEN HER GRANDFATHER RAVAGED BY T.B., HER MOTHER WRACKED WITH AGONIZING BONE CANCER.
SHE KNOWS.
I HOPE MOM RECOVERS, REGROWS HER HAIR, GETS IN SHAPE, TOURS EUROPE, FINDS A DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN WHO TREATS HER RIGHT, AND LIVES ANOTHER FORTY JOYFUL YEARS ... JUST OUT OF SPITE.
DEATH GETS US ALL ... BUT THERE'S NO SHAME IN MAKING HIM WORK FOR IT.

Fig. 13: *Mom's Cancer* (Fies, 89).

The panel represents a stage on which the imaginary scene is portrayed. While her bald-headedness underlines her helplessness facing the stern committee, the light cone, which is rather focussed on her, underlines the comment that it is her life. Simultaneously, the light cone features her as the accused one that has been captured and is now exposed to the public. Interpreted in this light, the scene represents not a graduation ceremony but a court hearing. The panel is visually divided into two opposing and antagonistic sides. The ones judging the mother's performance as insufficient and those supporting her. The comment at the end of the page thus reads like a plea of the defense. The author poses his own list that ironically remarks on and opposes the social constraints and supposedly scientifically backed up claims regarding the correct way to behave in the face of threatening death. In his list, which imitates the persuasiveness connected to enumerations in oral speech, the son-cartoonist formulates a counter-version for his dying mother: »I hope mom recovers, regrows her hair, gets in shape, tours Europe, finds a distinguished gentleman who treats her right, and lives another forty joyful years … just out of spite« (MC, 89). Using the list as a rhetorical device, this passage forms an argumentative list (cf. Fludernik 2016, 309) by which the son invents a vision for an alternative future.

As these examples show, lists easily transform into to-do-lists or how-to-behave instructions that submit lived experience to standardized expectations and prescriptions, and thus make it accessible for (unjustified) evaluation, assessment and judgement. If they cannot fulfil the social expectations, patients and caregivers are easily overcome by feelings of failure. The list is not only a form of disciplinary power (*sensu* Foucault) – as is most present in the bureaucratic document of the school report – it is also a literary and stylistic device used to express and make visible the often unexpressed and subliminal influence of social expectation and hegemonic structures. Conspicuously, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross warns her readers in the preface to her widely received standard work *On Death and Dying* that the book »is not meant to be read as a textbook on how to manage dying patients« (Preface). Yet, this is what often happens. The patient's non-compliance with the widely-received stages of dying bears potential for active resistance against the disciplinary power of social (and clinical) expectations that build on standardized conceptions rather than on individual experience.

Neither Failure nor Success: but Luck!

The binary poles failure vs. success are especially inadequate in the context of an illness where even doctors »never say ›cure‹, but keep[...] it as small as possible for as long as possible« (MC, 10). Instead of using the categories of failure and success or winning, fighting and losing the battle, Fies tellingly introduces the term »luck«. And he specifically emphasizes the idea that life with cancer is to be seen in terms of good luck or bad luck by repeatedly intro-

ducing panels (cf. 5, 35) that tell stories through the design of a dice game where individual playing pieces serve to narrate the plot and the course of events in a way that underlines the important role of chance, coincidence and contingency – in life in general and in the lives of the severely ill specifically. Eventually, this message is further highlighted by the printed pattern on the book end paper that consists of the sheer endless repetition of a dice and a playing piece.

By introducing the term ›luck‹ and additionally visualizing it through the symbolic figure of the dice, the disciplinary power of »the stigma and the taboo attached to individual failure« (Hamscha et al., 12) is broken. Eventually, Fies' mom sets her own lists, the lists of a suffering patient, against those that were dictated by medical and social expectations. In her afterword, which uses only verbal language, she makes herself the advocate of all those who »are limping around in foreign, broken bodies, filled with ›chemo brains‹ and radiation« and calls for »cancer treatment programs that include detoxing, physical and occupational therapy, exercise classes, pampering, and understanding« (115), and she concludes with a list of advice to all fellow sufferers:

> »Cherish rest, laughter, friends, and prayers. Trust in yourself and make a Peace Treaty with your Higher Power. Have a Hero to never let go of and help you through the terrifying nights. Take frequent baths to get rid of the scent of toxins. Watch a lot of comedies. Keep your mind and hands busy. Then just breathe as long as you can, knowing that others are helping to hold you up«. (MC, 115)

The mother's list, which evokes both the imperative style of self-help culture and the to-do list implicitly asks the readers to assume a new perspective on the people suffering from severe illness. It shows them as human beings that have not only medical, but also emotional, mental and spiritual needs. Through her ›counter-list‹ it becomes clear that medical check-list cultures reduces human beings to patients. This is an act of misrecognition which imprisons suffering persons »in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being« (Taylor, 25). As a consequence, this list of advice for fellow sufferers is an act of agency and self-definition that expresses a deep gesture of self-care and care for other severely ill people who also miss a more holistic approach to their situation and well-being.

Conclusion: The List as a Means of Remediation and Counterinscription

The memoirs on illness and care giving that were introduced in this essay show above all how the supposedly objective and documentary tool of the list is re-used and re-interpreted in the hand-drawn and deeply subjective narratives of illness and care. In *Can't we Talk About Something More Pleasant?* Roz Chast reflects on and criticises the list as a means of self-evaluation and self-optimization that easily turns into a binary form for the personal assessment

of (moral) failure and success. Through its remediation in the comics medium, the lists of self-evaluation turn from their cultural usage as tools for the stocktaking of personal failures into stylistic devices that poignantly criticize the binary logic of tabular lists as decontextualized and abstract forms, which, however, deeply influence the individual's self-conception. The remediation of the list as a form of (personal) assessment communicates and distills the felt pressure to succeed, the perceived demand to gratify the expectations of others and the aspiration to be ›a good patient‹, a ›good child‹ and ›a good carer‹ Thus, the list takes on the task to make visible the fear of failure and the (felt) standards and criteria which are used to evaluate people's performance as patients, as care-givers and as affected relatives.

By repeatedly featuring the practical list as a tool for financial calculation, Chast draws attention to the costs of terminal care and the burdensome consequences these have for the relatives. Simultaneously, however, she uses the list as a poetic device that deeply questions the logic of financial accounting in contexts of care. By remediating the form of the list as a means to calculate the affordability of terminal care, Chast draws attention to the bitter irony ultimately involved in calculating the value of a human life.

To show the effects of lists not only on care givers but also on the patients themselves, the second part of the essay has focussed on Brian Fies' graphic memoir *Mom's Cancer*. Although it also describes the failures experienced by the relatives of a severely ill person, it especially highlights the medicalization of the patient's illness experiences through standardized checklists and a medical language of assessment that excludes the patients. As a means to classify scientific phenomena (such as human bodies and their supposed deficiencies) medicine's expert language relies on a number of lists that not only reduce the patient to an object but that also itemize suffering patients into deficient body parts.

Eventually, the texts analysed use the remediation of the form of the list to critically comment on the shortcomings of the binary standards of self-examination and the supposedly objective and impersonal mode of the checklist in contexts of severe illness. Thus, the poetic remediation of the list becomes visible as a means to not only unmask the list's power to assess human beings according to standardized and often binary categories of evaluation, but also emphasizes how practices of list-making amount to an effacement of the ill and dying person as a holistic – that is physical, mental and emotional – being.

Via re-drawing, recreating and appropriating the list in the comics medium, the supposedly value-neutral and scientific tool, which in clinical contexts is even looked upon as a documentary form, is shown to be man-made, misleading and prone to blind spots. Thus, the remediation of the list form in the comics medium at once shows the »inscriptional effacement« (Huffner, 3) of patients and their caring relatives as well as it works as »a form of counterinscription« (Chute 2016, 4). While Hillary Chute used the term for comic documentaries like those of Joe Sacco, stressing the confrontation between the photographic documentary and the hand-drawn, I suggest that the term can also be used to describe the trans-

formation of the practical list as we find it in everyday contexts into its drawn remediation in the comics medium, in which it is re-used, re-interpreted and where its invisible power as a cultural form is made visible.

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1] »The term *affordance* refers to the relationship between a physical object and a person (or for that matter any interacting agent, whether animal or human, or even machines and robots). An affordance is a relationship between the properties of an object and the capabilities of the agent that determine just how the object could possibly be used« (Norman 2013,11; quoted in Von Contzen 2017, 319).

2] The collection was published and created in the context of a co-operation between Umberto Eco and the Louvre in Paris that invited the Italian scholar to organize as series of conferences, exhibitions, public readings and concerts on a subject of his own choice.

3] For a discussion of Franklin's catalog of virtues and the list as a form of »Seelenbuchhaltung« (accountability of the soul), cf. Mainberger, 192.

4] In the work of Roz Chast, list making is repeatedly used as a narrative device to express and come to terms with personal anxieties and the feelings of being overwhelmed by a specific situation or life in general. In the introduction to her cartoon style catalog *What I hate from A to Z* (2011) that lists all anxieties she could think of in alphabetical order, she gives us an explanation for her habit of list making: »I am playing the Alphabet Game in the hope that as I am playing, all those thoughts will settle down …« (Introduction). For Roz Chast, anxiety is one of the characteristic features she attributes to her personality (»I am an anxious person. I come from a line of anxious people«) and it is therefore no coincidence that her alphabetical catalog is dedicated »To my Parents, Elizabeth and George«.

5] Cf. Kübler-Ross, 34-99.

CLOSURE
Kieler e-Journal für Comicforschung

›Scheitern‹ als strukturgebendes Prinzip

Die Kunst zu fliegen (2012) von Antonio Altarriba und Kim

Daniela Kuschel (Mannheim)

›Scheitern‹ als strukturgebendes Prinzip

»Ich kann auch versichern, dass mein Vater für den Sturz aus dem vierten Stock neunzig Jahre brauchte« (*KzF*, 2). Mit dieser Aussage im erzählerischen Blocktext eines Panels, das ein Paar Pantoffeln auf dem Fensterbrett eines offenen Fensters mit wehenden Vorhängen zeigt, endet der einleitende Teil des Comics *Die Kunst zu fliegen* (*KzF*) von Antonio Altarriba (Text) und Kim (Zeichnungen).[1] Er erzählt die Lebensgeschichte von Antonio Altarriba Lopes, dem Vater des Texters, der sich 2001 aus dem vierten Stock seines Altersheims stürzte.

Die Motivation des Sohns, die Geschichte des Vaters zu erzählen, rührt von einer Frustration her, »[…] da Altarriba Jahr um Jahr mit ansehen musste, wie sein Vater bei lebendigem Leib tot und physisch zugrunde gerichtet war, bis schließlich auch sein Körper starb« (*KzF*, Epilog, 202). Der Tod des Vaters wird zum Moment des Scheiterns des Sohns, der nicht in der Lage war, dem Vater die eigene Lebensmüdigkeit zu nehmen, die die Jahre im spanischen Bürgerkrieg und im Zweiten Weltkrieg sowie im Exil und in der franquistischen Diktatur verursacht haben. Der Comic erzählt die Geschichte Altarribas aufbauend auf den Schilderungen seiner Tagebücher, die zunächst als therapeutisches Mittel gegen die zunehmende Depression gedacht waren (*KzF*, 6). Dies lässt sich als Versuch lesen, den zu Lebzeiten gescheiterten Dialog zwischen Vater und Sohn postmortem fortzuführen. Im Sinne von *Postmemory* (Hirsch) wird das Werk zum Mittel gegen das Vergessen und das Schweigen zwischen den Generationen. Es werden die persönlichen und individuellen Erinnerungen des Vaters recycelt und als Stellvertreter-Erinnerungen einer ganzen Generation präsentiert, deren Leben von den humanitären Katastrophen des 20. Jh. geprägt wurden, mit denen maßgeblich Erfahrungen des Um*sturzes* der alten Weltordnung einhergingen.

Der Gestus des freien Falls, des Abstürzens ins Bodenlose, der diesen Erfahrungen von Katastrophe und Umsturz eigen ist, und das generelle »Geworfen-sein« (Heidegger) in die Umstände der Zeit, das die eigenen Grenzen sichtbar macht und auch Erfahrungen

»geschichtliche[r] Willkür« (Koebner, 140) mit sich bringt, ist in *Die Kunst zu fliegen* Ausdruck des Scheiterns.

Der Selbstmord, der sich als tatsächlicher Sturz aus dem Fenster gestaltet, ist dabei zentrales Element. Er ist Erzählanlass und bildet zugleich die Rahmenerzählung, mittels derer die Lebensgeschichte des Protagonisten ›stockwerkweise‹ inszeniert wird, was den Status des Selbstmords als das Ende des sukzessiven Scheiterns der Verwirklichung der Existenz des Protagonisten verdeutlicht. Indem auf jedem Stockwerk, an dem Altarriba vorbeistürzt, nicht nur ein Abschnitt seines individuellen Lebens verhandelt wird, sondern auch eine historisch bewegte Epoche (Zweite Republik, Bürgerkrieg, Diktatur, *transición* bzw. Demokratie), wird das persönliche Scheitern des Protagonisten in Bezug zum Kollektiv und den Umsturzerfahrungen des 20. Jh. gestellt.

Der vorliegende Aufsatz sieht ›Scheitern‹ als grundlegendes strukturierendes Prinzip, das den untersuchten Comic sowohl motivisch-thematisch als auch diskursiv organisiert und zugleich an eine philosophisch-soziologische Haltung anknüpft, die das Verhältnis von Nomos und Anomie sowie mögliche Reaktionsmuster des Menschen, der sich zunehmender Desintegration und Orientierungslosigkeit durch die (welt-)geschichtlichen Umstürze ausgesetzt sieht, ins Zentrum stellt. ›Scheitern‹ wird dabei als schwerwiegender Misserfolg, als Verfehlen von zentralen Zielen oder Werten verstanden und ist eine soziale Konstruktion, die » ihre Schärfe auf der Grundlage von Dichotomisierungen bzw. Polarisierungen [erhält]« (Feldmann, 49–50).

Zunächst kann auf einer werktranszendenten Ebene danach gefragt werden, ob der fingierte Dialog zwischen Vater und Sohn gelingt. Dabei spielt der Rückgriff auf autobiografische Elemente und das Zelebrieren der Einheit von Vater und Sohn eine wichtige Rolle.

Zudem ist die erzählte Welt von Momenten des persönlichen Scheiterns des Protagonisten, aber auch anderer Figuren geprägt, verursacht durch die Umstände. ›Scheitern‹ wird auf unterschiedliche Weise motivisch integriert, wobei die Dialektik des Fliegens im Zentrum steht. ›Fliegen‹ wird im Titel des Comics als Kunst, etwas tun zu können, verstanden und ist doch immer mit ›Scheitern‹ verbunden. Denn, wenngleich es Sinnbild für Freiheit, Selbstbestimmung und individuelle Entfaltung sowie die Möglichkeit zum Ausbruch aus einer geltenden Ordnung ist, endet jeder Flug- und damit Fluchtversuch mit einer ›Bruchlandung‹, die oft ganz buchstäblich gemeint und mit einem physischen Aufprall verbunden ist. Der letzte und irreversible Aufprall ist der des Protagonisten auf dem Boden bei seinem Selbstmord. Sturz und Aufprall stehen in *Die Kunst zu fliegen* somit sinnbildlich für den Niedergang des Ich, dessen Ideale auf dem ›Boden der Tatsachen‹ aufprallen, das heißt an den Bedingungen der Wirklichkeit zerbrechen.

›Scheitern‹ ist zudem als Schreibweise punktuell sichtbar, indem Merkmale des Scheiterns in Erzählverfahren übersetzt werden, die »im Zeichen von Knappheit oder Exzess stehen« (Komorowska/Nickenig, 13) und Momente des »Scheitern[s] einer traditionellen Erzählökonomie« (Komorowska/Nickenig, 14) beschreiben. ›Punktuell‹ hebt hervor, dass

Die Kunst zu fliegen trotz derartiger ›Störgeräusche‹ eine starke formale Strukturierung und konventionelle Gestaltung innehat, die dafür sorgt, dass der Erzählprozess nachvollziehbar und verlässlich bleibt. Somit tragen die Medienspezifika (z. B. Panel- und Seitenlayout, Zeichenstil und Wort-Bild-Verhältnis) maßgeblich dazu bei, dass das ›Erzählen vom Scheitern‹ gelingt.

Seine Ausgestaltung, die an traditionelle literarische Erzählformen anknüpft, verleiht dem Comic einen ›Romancharakter‹. Mit Blick auf den Rezeptionsprozess wirkt dieser einem Scheitern der Kommunikation zwischen Werk und Leser_in entgegen, das aufgrund der tiefen Einbettung des Comics in kulturelle Kontexte, für die Symbole und Ikone sowie Erinnerungsfiguren und Archivierungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses prägend sind, denkbar wäre.

»Ich war in ihm« – Spannung und Legitimierung der Erzählinstanz(en)

Der Kommentar im Blocktext, »[a]lso erzähle ich das Leben meines Vaters aus seiner Sicht, aber aus meiner Perspektive« (*KzF*, 7), eröffnet das Spiel mit der Erzählstimme, das den gesamten Comic durchzieht, und rückt seine autobiografische Färbung in den Vordergrund. Unter anderem unter dem Genrebegriff der »Graphic Memoirs« (Schröer, 265–267) diskutiert die Forschung zunehmend Autobiographisches im Comic. In *Die Kunst zu fliegen* potenzieren das Spiel mit der Erzählstimme, die sowohl auf den Texter als auch seinen Vater verweist, sowie die Nicht-Identität von Texter und Zeichner das im Medium aufgrund seiner multimodalen Erzählweise ohnehin problematische Verständnis eines klassischen autobiografischen Pakts.

Der Zeichner, Kim, überträgt die Familiengeschichte der Altarribas in Bildsprache und gibt der Erzählung seine individuelle zeichnerische Handschrift, mit der sich ein ganz persönliches Körpermerkmal in den Text einschreibt und ihm so eine biografische Note verleiht (Schröer, 269). Trotz der humoristischen Unterschiede zu seiner bekannten Satire-Serie *Martínez el facha* ist der schlichte Stil des Zeichners deutlich erkennbar. In diesem steht die Figurengestaltung im Vordergrund und trägt die Geschichte. Die Übertragung in Bildsequenzen lässt sich als spezifische Lesart der Erzählung Altarribas durch den Zeichner betrachten, die sich aus dessen Weltsicht und Erfahrungen speist.

Die Erzählung selbst ist das Produkt der Anordnung und Stilisierung des genuin autobiografischen Materials des Vaters (der Tagebücher und mündlichen Berichte) zu einer kohärenten Erzählung, in der eine Erzählerfigur erzeugt wird, die sowohl auf den Texter als auch seinen Vater als reale Personen verweist.

Diese Aneignung des Materials durch den Sohn und damit die mehrfache Besetzung der autobiografischen Instanz stellt der Comic auch innerfiktional zu Beginn zur Schau. Der

Unterscheidung von Groensteen (93 zit. in: Schröer 2016) folgend, ist der *récitant* im einleitenden Teil als Stimme des Sohnes markiert, der *monstrateur* als Vater. Zu Beginn des nächsten Kapitels verändert sich diese Relation wissentlich: »Mein Vater, der ich nun bin […] / Mein Großvater, der nun mein Vater ist […] / Ich, der ich nun ein einziges ›Ich‹ bin, fühlte mich« (*KzF*, 11). *Monstrateur* und *récitant* verschmelzen vermeintlich. Aufgrund des dargestellten und zelebrierten Übergangs in der einleitenden Sequenz bleibt die Ich-Erzählung jedoch von Spannungen zwischen einem auktorialen *récitant* und einem figuralen *monstrateur* geprägt, wird nie vollständig die des Protagonisten und hält die Verdopplung der autobiografischen Instanz aufrecht, wodurch die Zuverlässigkeit der Erzählstimme in Frage gestellt wird.

Trotz dieser Spannungen und Diskrepanzen gelingt es dem Comic, eine glaubwürdige Erzählung zu erzeugen, die sich durch die genetische und affektive Verbindung zwischen den Erzählinstanzen legitimiert: »Nur ich kann es wissen […] / Ich bin immer in ihm gewesen« oder »Ich stamme von ihm ab, bin seine Erweiterung« (*KzF*, 5).

Die Erzählweise des Comic verweist, indem die Erzählerfigur sich die Geschichte des Anderen buchstäblich einverleibt, auf eine Identifikation des Texters mit den Erinnerungen des Vaters, die sich auch in der Bildsprache und dem Stil von Kim, der das Mensch-Sein betont, widerspiegelt. So schreiben sich Texter und Zeichner in die Geschichte von Altarriba Senior ein, was den Comic auch zu einer Reflexion über das Kollektiv macht, dem sie selbst angehören und dem die Umsturzerfahrungen der vorhergien Generation noch eingeschrieben sind.

»Und jetzt fliege ich los…«: Fliegen und Abstürzen als zentrale Motive des Scheiterns

Indem der Protagonist seinen Selbstmord mit den Gedanken »Und jetzt fliege ich los…« (*KzF*, 7) einleitet und sich aus dem Fenster stürzt, legt der Comic sein metaphorisches Verständnis vom Fliegen offen, das in engem Zusammenhang zur Dichotomie von Be- und Entgrenzung steht. Flug und Absturz sind als zentrale Motive in *Die Kunst zu fliegen* unweigerlich miteinander verbunden. Der Motivbegriff wird hierbei als »fest umrissene thematische Konstellation« (Lubkoll, 383) gedacht, die auf unterschiedliche Weise in Bild und Sprache des Comics Ausdruck findet, z. B. durch die Verwendung von Tropen, Symbolen oder Abbildungen, die auf das Motiv rekurrieren.

Zum einen ist das ›Fliegen‹ bzw. der Traum vom Fliegen im Comic allgegenwärtig. Dazu gehören neben Abbildungen von Flügeln und Fluggeräten, prototypischen Orten (allen voran der Himmel) sowie sprachlichen Rekursen auf das Wortfeld auch Körpergefühle wie Schwindel oder das Gefühl von Schwerelosigkeit.

Reiz und Faszination des Fliegens sind in allen Kulturkreisen verankert und haben anthropologischen Wert, der sich auf die kosmologische Bedeutung der Eroberung des

Raums zwischen Himmel und Erde bezieht (Behringer/Ott-Kotschalijski, 22–24). Als eines der ältesten Motive ist es seit der Antike Sinnbild der Sehnsucht nach Entgrenzung und Selbstbestimmung (Pabst, 341–342).

›Fliegen‹ lässt sich im Werk insgesamt als Ausdruck des Freiheitsdrangs und des Wunschs nach Entfaltung und Entwicklung des eigenen Daseins, der »Existenz« (Heidegger), lesen. Innerhalb der Umstände der thematisierten Epochen steht diese Entwicklung im Zusammenhang mit dem Ausbrechen aus starren (sozialen, ökonomischen und ideologischen) Strukturen. Die ›Flüge‹, die sich in *Die Kunst zu fliegen* abzeichnen, repräsentieren dementsprechend ideologische, ökonomische und affektive Vorhaben.

Zum anderen schwingt in jedem Flug unweigerlich das Risiko des Abstürzens mit, was sinnbildlich für das Scheitern steht. Symptomatisch für *Die Kunst zu fliegen* enden alle ›Flug‹- oder besser gesagt Fluchtversuche des Protagonisten mit einem Absturz, ausgelöst durch verschiedene Formen der Begrenzung, und dem daraus resultierenden Aufprall.

Die Reihe von dargestellten ›Flügen‹, ›Abstürzen‹ und ›Aufprallen‹ läuft sukzessive auf ihren tragischen Höhe- und Endpunkt zu: den Sturz und tödlichen Aufprall beim Selbstmord, den Altarriba selbst als ›Flug‹ verstanden haben will.

Innerhalb der Binnenerzählung ist diese Reihe chronologisch angelegt. Beginnend in der Kindheit erzählt der Comic, wie durch die Begrenzungen, mit denen der Protagonist konfrontiert ist, eine Sehnsucht nach Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung entsteht. Eingeengt in die landwirtschaftliche Tradition seiner Familie, sind es Mauern, die diese Begrenzung verbildlichen. Der Comic nutzt die Darstellbarkeit der physischen Mauern, die im aufkommenden Streit um Besitzansprüche die Felder eingrenzen, um auch die Mauern zu thematisieren, die Produkte der sozialen und familiären Ordnung sind. Indem der Protagonist beim zeitweisen Überwinden der physischen Mauern abgebildet wird, was über sprachliche Evokation als Fliegen bezeichnet wird (»Das ist wie Fliegen!« ruft Altarriba, umrahmt von geschwungenen Bewegungslinien, als er über eine der Mauern springt [*KzF*, 17]), wird auch das Potential der Entgrenzung deutlich. Momente der Entgrenzung zeichnen sich im Verlauf der Erzählung in Bereichen ab, die nicht vollständig von der Ordnung kontrolliert werden können und von impulsiver Natur sind: im Spiel, in Wünschen und in der Fantasie sowie in der Sexualität. Die Impulsivität drückt sich dabei in den Zeichnungen durch die Betonung von Bewegungslinien, die vermehrte Verwendung von *Soundwords* sowie durch (inhaltliche) Übertreibungen aus.

Im Zusammenhang mit dem Flugmotiv spielt das Automobil eine zentrale Rolle. Es steht für Fortschritt, Mobilität und (Bewegungs-)Freiheit sowie den Rausch der Geschwindigkeit, das Gefühl schwere- und damit grenzenlos zu sein. Diese enge Verbindung stärkt die Verankerung der Sehnsüchte in der konkreten Realität des Protagonisten, der nichts lieber sein will als Fahrer. Er versteht sich als »[…] Spezialist in Autoflügen« (*KzF*, 60) und lässt sich unter anderem als Ausdruck für Effizienz Flügel an das Fahrzeug montieren, mit dem er im Krieg die Feldpost ausfährt (*KzF*, 59).

Der Comic stellt bereits im ersten Kapitel diese bild-/sprachliche Verbindung her: Die *Over-the-shoulder*-Perspektive simuliert den Blick des Protagonisten und seines Freundes Basilio in den Himmel, der als prototypischster Ort des Fliegens und Sinnbild für Freiheit und Unbegrenztheit gilt. Über *scene-to-scene* wird ein Bezug zum vorherigen Panel hergestellt, in dem der Sohn eines benachbarten Großgrundbesitzers im *Hispano Suiza* förmlich ›vorbeifliegt‹, wie die Bewegungslinien, der aufgewirbelte Staub der Straße und die Soundwords verdeutlichen (*KzF*, 21). Mobilität schafft Freiheit und (Selbst-)Bestimmung über die Strukturen, in die man ›geworfen‹ wurde.

ICH GLAUBE, ES IST EIN HISPANO-SUIZA.
EIN HISPANO-SUIZA! WENN MAN DEN PFLEGT UND DIE GÄNGE VOLL AUSREIZT, BRINGT MAN IHN ZUM FLIEGEN!
RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRMMMMMMMMM
NACH UND NACH BEGRIFF ICH, DASS ES FÜR MANCHE MENSCHEN KEINE BARRIEREN GAB, WEIL SIE SIE NACH BELIEBEN ERRICHTETEN UND BESEITIGTEN.
21

Abb. 1: Mobilität und Weite als Sinnbilder für Freiheit (*KzF*, 21).

Aufgrund ihrer sozioökonomischen Realität ist den Freunden, im Gegensatz zum Nachbarssohn, eine solche ›Bewegungsfreiheit‹ verwehrt. Es bleibt ihnen nur die Flucht in die Fantasie, in der Aus*flüge* bzw. Aus*flüchte* sowie die Erfahrung von Entgrenzung möglich werden. Der Eskapismus drückt die Diskrepanz von Wunsch und Realität aus und wird in einem Panel, das die beiden Freunde in ihrem selbstgebauten Holzauto über den Wolken fliegend zeigt, verbildlicht (*KzF*, 23).

Was in der Fantasie gelingt, ist in der Realität zum Scheitern verurteilt. Ein fahrtüchtiges Gefährt, das die beiden Freunde konstruieren, zerschellt bei der ersten Fahrt an einer der Mauern (*KzF*, 27). Das Scheitern des Versuchs, Entgrenzung in der Realität zu erfahren, findet auf der Bild- und Sprachebene im Aufprall, dem zerbeulten Auto und dem Ausruf Basilios, »Scheiß Mauern«, Ausdruck. Einige Panels später wiederholt sich die ›Bruchlandung‹: Basilio hat den *Hispano-Suiza* des Nachbarn gestohlen, um (sich) zu beweisen, dass er ›fliegen‹, also frei und selbstbestimmt sein kann. Die Erzählstimme kommentiert die Kurz-

lebigkeit des Traums, der tödlich endet: »Basilio gelang es zu fliegen, … / … wenn auch nur für einige Sekunden« (*KzF*, 28). Die Überzeugung, man solle alles für seine Wünsche geben, auch das eigenen Leben, schwingt hier mit; die Selbstüberschätzung Basilios wird nur am Rande thematisiert.

Die Flüge in *Die Kunst zu fliegen* sind immer Ausdruck von Sehnsüchten. So auch der imaginierte Flug mit der Nähmaschine.

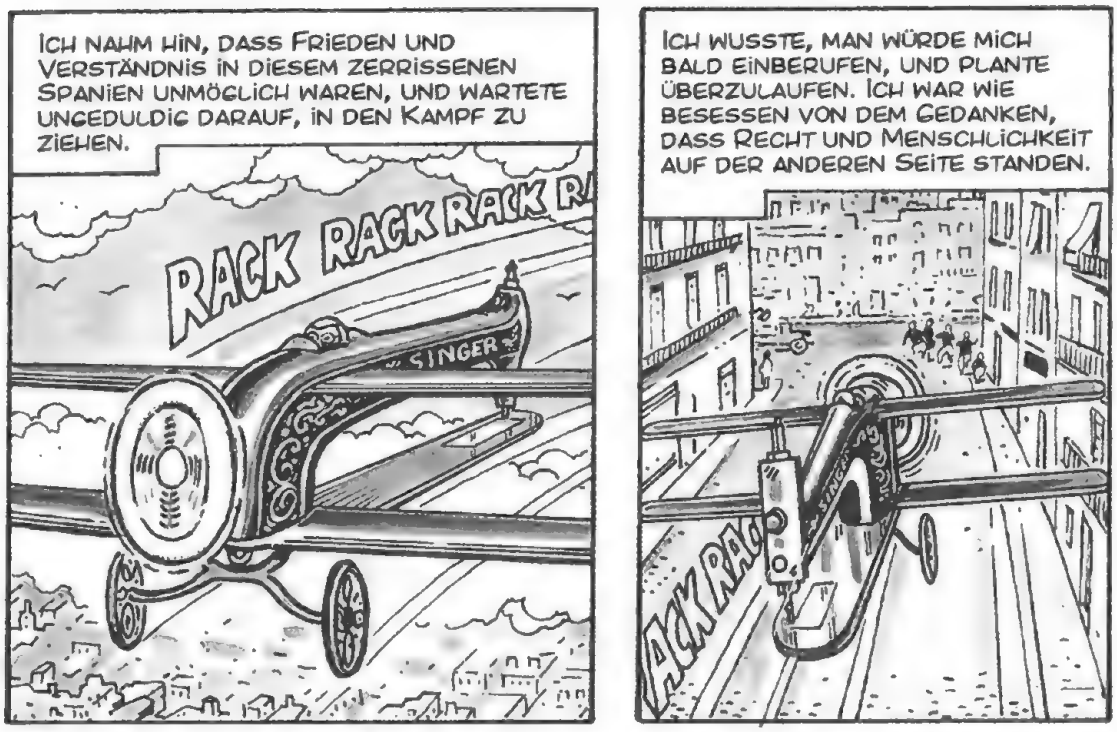
ICH NAHM HIN, DASS FRIEDEN UND VERSTÄNDNIS IN DIESEM ZERRISSENEN SPANIEN UNMÖGLICH WAREN, UND WARTETE UNGEDULDIG DARAUF, IN DEN KAMPF ZU ZIEHEN.
RACK RACK RACK
SINGER
ICH WUSSTE, MAN WÜRDE MICH BALD EINBERUFEN, UND PLANTE ÜBERZULAUFEN. ICH WAR WIE BESESSEN VON DEM GEDANKEN, DASS RECHT UND MENSCHLICHKEIT AUF DER ANDEREN SEITE STANDEN.
ACK RACK

Abb. 2: Eine Nähmaschine wird zum Kampfflugzeug (*KzF*, 45).

Im erzählerischen Blocktext der Sequenz sinniert die Erzählstimme über den Plan des Protagonisten, auf die republikanische Seite überzulaufen. Der Bilddiskurs zeigt einen Luft-Angriff auf Mitglieder der Falange, die den Protagonisten ein paar Panels zuvor niedergeschlagen und dazu gezwungen haben, »Cara al Sol«, die Hymne der Falange, zu singen. Die Nähmaschine, die für den beruflichen und damit ökonomischen Misserfolg Altarribas steht – wer kauft in Zeiten von Krieg und Knappheit Nähmaschinen? – wird zum Flucht-Vehikel und Kampfflugzeug stilisiert, mit dem er in seiner Fantasie Vergeltung üben und in eine bessere Zukunft fliehen kann. Die fantastische Sequenz ist durch den Zeichenstil und die Panelanordnung nahtlos in die realistische Schreibweise des Comics eingebettet. Das Flugobjekt selbst und die onomatopoetischen Elemente, »Rack Rack Rack« und »Tack Tack Tack« – Funktionsgeräusche der Nähmaschine, die zu Geräuschen eines Kampffliegers umgedeutet werden – markieren im Zusammenspiel mit dem Erzählertext den

imaginierten Charakter der Sequenz. Diese endet mit einem Panel, das die Nähmaschine ›über den Wolken‹ zeigt. Die Untersicht im Panel erzeugt jedoch eine Trennung der Erzählperspektiven, die dem irrtümlichen Glauben des Protagonisten, seine Ideale zu erlangen, vorgreift.

Die verschiedenen Abbildungen des Himmels sind eine Konstante und stehen in unterschiedlichem Verhältnis zum Protagonisten. Zu Beginn als erreichbarer Sehnsuchtsort markiert, erlebt der Protagonist zeitweise Lebensglück, das sich durch eine Perspektive aus dem Himmel heraus ausdrückt. Nach der Flucht nach Frankreich und den überlebten Strapazen in einem der Auffanglager am Strand von Saint-Cyprien findet Altarriba Zuflucht auf einem Bauernhof, wo er den Krieg vorübergehend vergisst. Das Glück, das er dort empfindet, drückt sich im idyllisch dargestellten Familienleben und im Sex mit Madeleine aus, dem eine karikatureske Überzeichnung anhaftet, die Ungezwungenheit suggeriert (*KzF*, 91f). Bildsprachlich besonders betont wird dieser Zustand des Glücks zudem in einer Sequenz aus zwei Panels, in der der Protagonist die Welt von oben betrachtet und darüber sinniert, was im Leben wesentlich ist. Er befindet sich buchstäblich ›im Himmel‹:

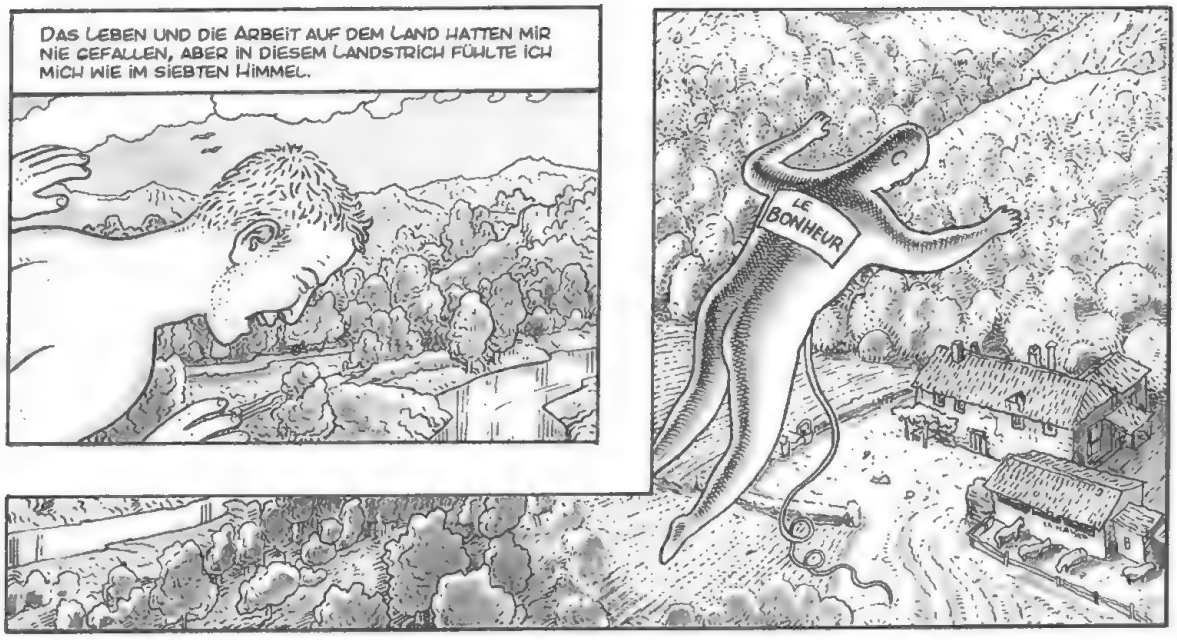
DAS LEBEN UND DIE ARBEIT AUF DEM LAND HATTEN MIR NIE GEFALLEN, ABER IN DIESEM LANDSTRICH FÜHLTE ICH MICH WIE IM SIEBTEN HIMMEL.
LE BONHEUR

Abb. 3: ›Le Bonheur‹ und die Freiheit, sich zu entfalten (*KzF*, 92).

Altarriba wird als Helium-Ballon, der die Aufschrift ›Le Bonheur‹ (dt. das Glück) trägt und an einer Schnur über dem Boden schwebt, dargestellt. Die Schnur verbildlicht die im Zitat des ersten Panels angedeutete Verbindung zum Boden, die Verankerung in einem Leben, das genug Freiheit zur Entfaltung lässt. Der These vom notorischen Scheitern gemäß muss Altarriba diese Idylle jedoch verlassen.

Am Ende des zweiten Kapitels ist der Himmel, der Ort der Entgrenzung, schließlich unerreichbar über ihm, verbildlicht in einem *landscape panel* in Untersicht (*KzF*, 122). Die ökonomische Misere der Kriegszeit in Marseille, in der Altarriba erneut die Missstände der Gesellschaft – Korruption, Ausbeutung und Gewalt – und damit die Begrenzungen zu spüren bekommt sowie der Tod seiner Mutter beschließen den ›Traum vom Fliegen‹. Der Protagonist gibt seine zentralen Werte und Ideale – maßgeblich Gerechtigkeit, Chancengleichheit und das Recht auf Selbstbestimmung – auf: »Am besten vergaß ich die Zeit, in der ich von Idealen beflügelt schier geflogen war …« (*KzF*, 122).

In der neuen totalitären Ordnung der Franco-Diktatur kann er nur so überleben, dennoch tritt das Flugmotiv als Hoffnungsträger wieder in Erscheinung, als er seine zukünftige Frau Petra kennenlernt und sich ein vermeintlicher Ausweg, zumindest aus der affektiven Misere, auftut. Leidenschaft, Sehnsucht nach Geborgenheit und der Wunsch, aus der Realität mit ihren ideologischen Zwängen und ökonomischen Nöten zu flüchten, wird im imaginären Flug des Paars in einer Riesenrad-Gondel, die sich vom Riesenrad löst und gen Mond fliegt, verbildlicht (*KzF*, 138). Der ›affektive Flug‹ mit Petra verkehrt sich im von rigiden Moralvorstellungen geprägten Franquismus schnell ins Gegenteil. Ausdruck findet diese Beschneidung unter anderem im Sex der Eheleute, der in völligem Kontrast zum Sex mit Madeleine im französischen Exil steht. Zeichnerisch wird nicht wie in Letzterem durch Übertreibung und Komik der ungezwungene, lustvolle Charakter herausgestellt (*KzF*, 91f), sondern in nur drei Panels wird ein gezwungener und lustfreier Akt dargestellt (*KzF*, 140). Als Verdrängung und Ausbruchsversuch aus dem engen Normen- und Wertekorsett der Zeit, beginnt Altarriba eine Affäre mit der ebenfalls emotional gescheiterten Frau seines Kompagnons. Der Sex hat einen triebhaften, aggressiven und auch verzweifelten Unterton, der zeichnerisch durch pornographische Züge zum Ausdruck kommt (*KzF*, 150f).

Die sehr unterschiedliche Darstellung der Sexualität und ihrer Bedingungen im Comic verweist auf das zwiespältige Ausloten von Be- und Entgrenzung. Wunsch, Ideal und kontrastive Wirklichkeit zeigen darin ihre Wechselwirkungen.

Abb. 4: Drei Arten des Sex als Ausdruck des Kontrasts von Ideal und Wirklichkeit (*KzF*, 91, 140, 150).

Über weitere kleinere Flüge und Stürze nähert sich Altarriba sukzessive seinem letzten ›Flug‹: dem Selbstmord. Klaus Feldmann (58) versteht Suizid als außerordentliche Form des Scheiterns, die nur dann als solches anzusehen ist, wenn »natürliches Sterben« als richtig definiert und der Selbstmord damit als »Desertion oder Schwachwerden« eingestuft und zum abweichenden Verhalten wird. Wenngleich die medizinisch-psychologische Suizidologie den Selbstmord in der Regel als Scheitern behandelt, ist gesamtgesellschaftlich die Frage, ob er als Scheitern oder gerade Sieg über den Nomos zu bewerten ist, zur Ansichtssache und Privatangelegenheit geworden (ibid.).

Die Darstellung des Selbstmords in *Die Kunst zu fliegen* ist humoristisch-melancholisch geprägt und wird zu keiner Zeit negativ mit Vorwürfen durch den Sohn oder die (fiktive) Gesellschaft aufgeladen. Der Suizid wird vielmehr als »Lösung eines existenziellen Problems« (Jean Baechler, zit. in: Aherns, 13) dargestellt und empathisch affiziert. Altarribas Selbstmord ist damit der einzige ›Flug‹, der trotz oder gerade des Aufpralls wegen, der sonst das Scheitern besiegelt, gelingt. Da seine »›Devianz‹ [...] durch den Nomos nicht mehr zu ahnden [ist]« (Ahern, 7), ermöglicht der Selbstmord die endgültige Flucht aus den Zwängen. Innerhalb der Erzähllogik des Comics ist er, wenngleich als Folge einer Depression dargestellt, »keine Krankheit, sondern vielmehr ein Ausbruch ›aus der Logik des Lebens‹« und drückt die »existentiale Freiheit« (Aherns, 14) des Protagonisten aus.

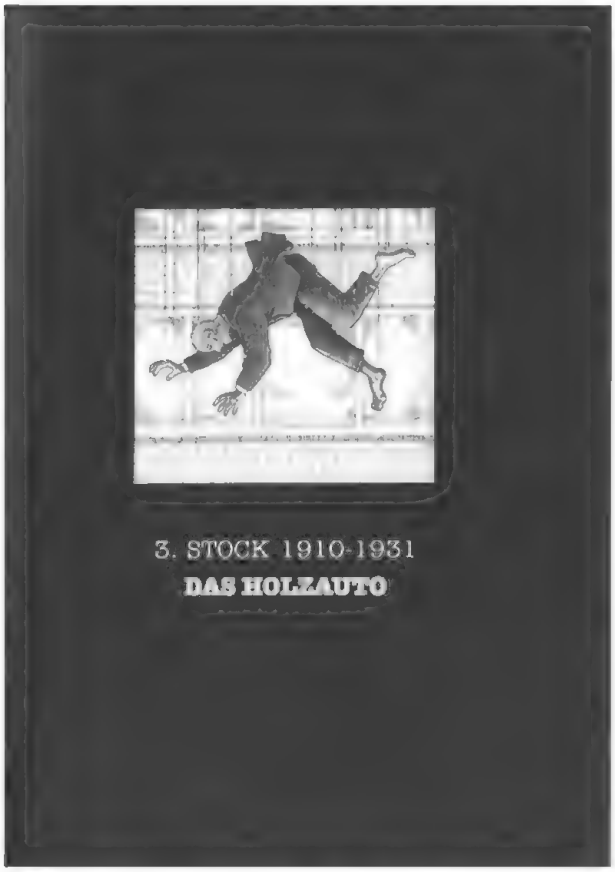

Abb. 5: Beispiel einer der Kapitel-Titelseiten als Sturz-Standbild (*KzF*, 8).

›Punktuelles‹ Scheitern des *Discours* – Gelingen des ›Erzählens vom Scheitern‹

Jedes Kapitel (mit Ausnahme des einleitenden Teils) beginnt mit einer schwarzen Seite, auf deren Vorderseite jeweils zentriert ein Panel sowie der Titel des Kapitels abgedruckt ist. Die Panels zeigen Einzelbilder des stürzenden Protagonisten, jeweils auf der Höhe eines der vier Stockwerke des Altersheims. Der Titel gibt neben der Zeitspanne und dem zentralen Aspekt des Kapitels an, auf Höhe welchen Stockwerks sich Altarriba gerade befindet, wodurch die Kapitelnummerierungen invertiert werden.

Das inszenierte Standbild hält den Erzählprozess an, die Erzählzeit der Rahmenhandlung wird pausiert, der Bewegungsfluss, den die Panels als zusammengesetzte Sequenz ergeben würden, wird angehalten und aufgesplittet. So werden die Leser_innen dazu eingeladen, von der Chronologie und Linearität, die das Werk insgesamt auszeichnen, abzuschweifen. Der Comic hält inne. Dadurch wird der Binnenerzählung Raum gegeben und »[e]mphatisch wird die Bedeutung des Augenblicks erhöht und unterstrichen« (Wulff, o. S.). Somit suggerieren diese Seiten, dass das, was im Kapitel folgt, parallel zum Sturz des Protagonisten gelesen werden muss. Indem die Rahmenhandlung auf diese Art den gesamten Diskurs prägt, wird eine traditionelle Erzählökonomie, die auf ein plausibles Verhältnis von Erzählzeit und erzählter Zeit setzt, zunächst verworfen.

In den einzelnen Kapiteln finden sich weitere ›Pausen‹ und Auslassungen, die angefangene Geschichten nicht zu Ende erzählen oder unterbrechen. Teilweise eingeleitet durch Zweifel, die der Erzähler verbal zum Ausdruck bringt, bieten diese Panels, die häufig Wege, Landschaften oder den Himmel zeigen, ›Fluchtlinien‹ an, die die Linearität der Erzählung unterlaufen, »damit die Leser auswählen und ihre eigenen Schlüsse ziehen.«[2] Auslassungen der drastischen Art sind schwarze Panels, die immer in Verbindung mit dem Sterben – sowohl physisch als auch sozial – stehen.

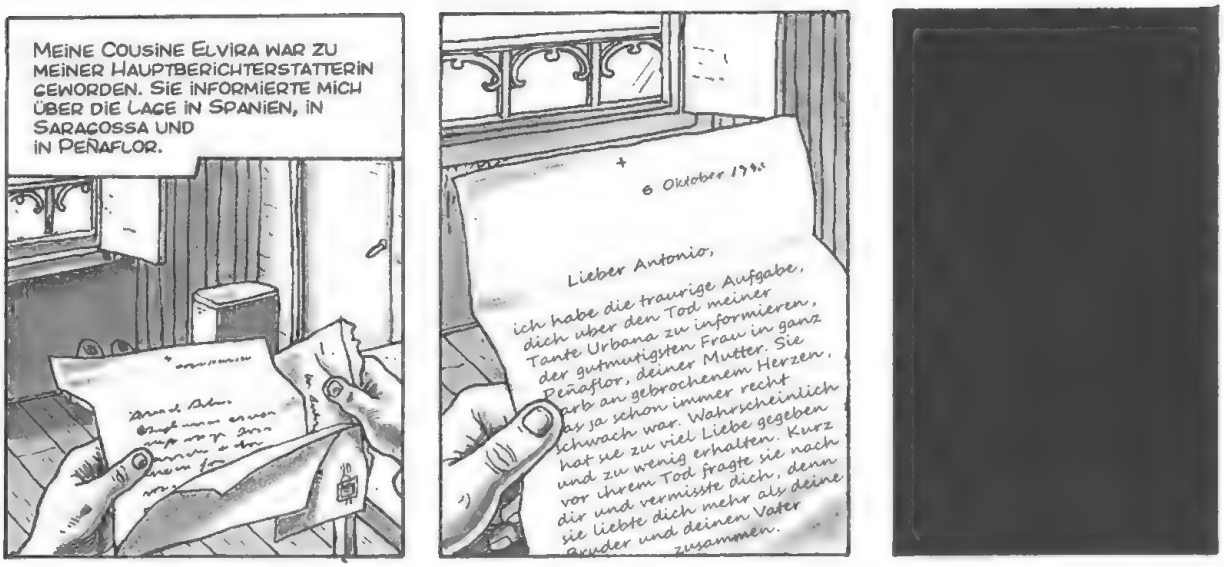
MEINE COUSINE ELVIRA WAR ZU MEINER HAUPTBERICHTERSTATTERIN GEWORDEN. SIE INFORMIERTE MICH ÜBER DIE LAGE IN SPANIEN, IN SARAGOSSA UND IN PEÑAFLOR.
6 Oktober 179
Lieber Antonio,
ich habe die traurige Aufgabe, dich über den Tod meiner Tante Urbana zu informieren, der gutmütigsten Frau in ganz Peñaflor, deiner Mutter. Sie starb an gebrochenem Herzen, was ja schon immer recht schwach war. Wahrscheinlich hat sie zu viel Liebe gegeben und zu wenig erhalten. Kurz vor ihrem Tod fragte sie nach dir und vermisste dich, denn sie liebte dich mehr als deine Brüder und deinen Vater zusammen.

Abb. 6: Die Betroffenheit über den Tod der Mutter findet Ausdruck in schwarzem Panel (*KzF*, 124).

Die Verbildlichung suggeriert Dunkelheit und damit, dass der Protagonist ›erblindet‹, was teilweise auch verbalisiert wird (*KzF*, 117, 135). Es ist jedoch kein äußeres, sinnliches Unvermögen gemeint, sondern es wird auf eine geistige und emotionale Leere oder auf den Verlust von (moralischer) Integrität angespielt. Die schwarzen Panels unterbrechen zudem die Integrität der Erzählung, denn sie sind nicht handlungsgebun-

den, sondern drücken einen seelischen Zustand aus, der offenbar nicht über den sonst realistischen oder fantastischen Bilddiskurs oder den Erzähltext artikuliert werden kann.

Insgesamt steht das Erzählen und damit die Vermittlung der Geschichte(n), im Vordergrund des Comics, der sich in der Binnenerzählung darum bemüht, den Erzählfluss aufrechtzuerhalten. Stark narrativ ausgelegt, sind die Erzählinstanzen stets greifbar und lenken das Geschehen durch Selektion und Kommentierung. Der Detailreichtum auf Bild- und Textebene führt punktuell zwar dazu, dass die Erzählung ausfranst und Nebenschauplätze geöffnet werden, einer zu starken Digression wirken jedoch die Strukturierung auf formaler Ebene sowie die Wahl der Ordnungsprinzipien des Mediums entgegen, die die *closure* vereinfachen und so die Lektüre steuern. Durch regelmäßige und dicke *gutter* wird jedes Einzelpanel fokussiert, was Übersichtlichkeit auf der Seite schafft. Zudem tragen konventionalisierte Formen und Muster, wie eine konventionelle Seitengestaltung, die sich durch einen mehrheitlich verwendeten *uniform grid* (drei Zeilen à drei Panels) auszeichnet und deren Ränder klar konturiert sind, zu formaler Ordnung bei. Insgesamt lenken nur wenige, experimentell anmutende formale Aspekte, die das Medium, seine Machart und Erzählweise betonen, von der Vermittlung der Geschehnisse ab. So driften nur an wenigen Stellen Sprechblasen oder andere Objekte über den Panelrand hinaus. Diese Stellen betonen, was verhandelt wird, oder heben den Objekt-Charakter eines Gegenstands hervor, so z. B. bei den inszenierten Fotos aus dem Auffanglager in Saint-Cyprès, die sich in die Ikonografie der Kriege des 20. Jh. einschreiben:

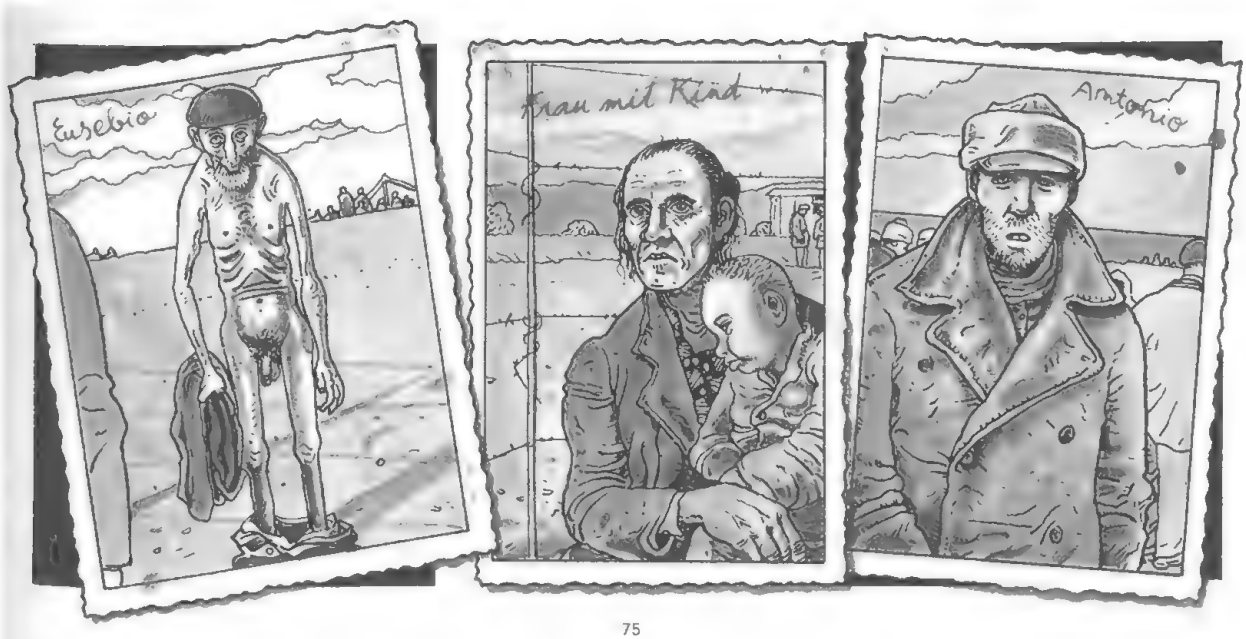

Abb. 7: Inszenierte Fotografien (*KzF*, 75).

Zudem finden sich Panels, die von der dominanten rechteckigen Form abweichen, allerdings folgen sie wiederum konventionalisierten Varianten, indem z. B. ein gewellter Rahmen eine Traum-Sequenz oder zusätzliche Binnenerzählungen ausweist.

Trotz der Universalisierungen in *Die Kunst zu fliegen*, die Kriegs- und Umbruchserfahrungen im Allgemeinen thematisieren, ist der Comic gespickt von kulturellen Markern mit symbolischer Qualität. Wenngleich sich das Werk eines Mediums bedient, das in Kontexten mit breiterer Publikumssemantik agiert, setzt seine Ausgestaltung sowohl auf einen geübten Comic-Leser_in als auch auf ein Publikum, das mit der Geschichte Spaniens und den Fallstricken einer ›Vergangenheitsbewältigung à la española‹ (Neuschäfer) vertraut ist. Der Detailreichtum auf Bild- und Textebene sowie das korrelative Bild-Text-Verhältnis ermöglichen es jedoch, dass sich Leser_innen unterschiedlicher Vorwissensgrade und kultureller Umgebungen eine kohärente Erzählung eröffnet.

Schluss

Wenn Frustration zur Motivation wird, die Geschichte des eigenen Vaters zu erzählen, wenn dessen Suizid als Erzählanlass dient, die Peripetien eines individuellen Lebens im Umfeld kollektiver Umsturzerfahrungen in den Blick zu nehmen, erscheint ›Scheitern‹ als strukturgebendes Prinzip. Der Rückgriff auf autobiografisches Material und die fingierte Verschmelzung der Erzählinstanzen schafft Raum für einen Dialog zwischen den Generationen im Sinne der *Postmemory*. Die Dialektik des Fliegens, die mittels der zentralen Motive von ›Flug‹ und ›Absturz‹ kontrastiv verarbeitet wird, ist Dreh- und Angelpunkt der Erzählung: ›Fliegen‹ steht sinnbildlich für Freiheit, Selbstbestimmung und Entgrenzung, wenn der ›Flug‹ gelingt und für Gefangenschaft, Fremdbestimmung und Begrenzung bis hin zum Zerfall des Ich, wenn er scheitert.

In *Die Kunst zu fliegen* ergibt sich eine Reihe von Flügen, Stürzen und Aufprallen, die einen Rhythmus vom Scheitern erzeugen, der zwischen den Höhen und Tiefen des Lebens des Protagonisten und den weltgeschichtlichen Ereignissen oszilliert. Tragischer Höhepunkt ist dabei der Suizid des Protagonisten, der als Folge einer Serie von Versuchen, ein selbstbestimmtes Leben zu führen, die an den Umständen der Zeit scheitern, lesbar wird.

Auf diskursiver Ebene lässt sich von einem ›punktuellen Scheitern‹ sprechen, das Momente der Offenheit und Fluchtlinien schafft, die die Linearität und Chronologie der Erzählung unterlaufen und damit die individuelle Lebensgeschichte auf eine kollektive Ebene heben.

Durch seinen ›implizierten Romancharakter‹ und seine formale Strukturierung gelingt es dem Comic, einem möglichen kommunikativen Scheitern zwischen Text und Leser_in entgegenzuwirken und den angestrebten Dialog zwischen den Generationen im Sinne der *Postmemory* für die Dauer der Lektüre am Laufen zu halten, sodass das Erzählen vom Scheitern nicht zwangsläufig selbst scheitern muss.

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1] Der Original-Titel lautet *El arte de volar* und ist 2009 bei Edicions de Ponent (Alicante) erschienen. Antonio Altarriba Ordóñez (*1952) ist ein spanischer Schriftsteller, Comic-Autor und Kritiker. Er ist Professor für französische Literatur der Universität des Baskenlands; Kim heißt mit bürgerlichem Namen Joaquim Aubert Puigarnau und ist ein katalanischer Comic-Zeichner (*1941), der unter anderem durch seine satirische Comic-Strip-Serie *Martínez el Facha* bekannt ist (1977-2015 erschienen in *El Jueves*, einem Satire-Magazin, das ein dem Eulenspiegel-Magazin ähnliches Format hat).

2] Eigene Übersetzung des Original-Prologs, da die Passage nicht im Epilog von *Die Kunst zu fliegen* übersetzt wurde.

CLOSURE
Kieler e-Journal für Comicforschung

»You Can't Save The World Alone«

Zum zeitgenössischen Comicfilm in Serie

Peter Vignold (Bochum)

Die aus dem Fandiskurs heraus entstandene Geschichtsschreibung des Superheld_innen-Comics ist in sogenannten ›ages‹ strukturiert, »periods of time that share a nexus of concerns, storytelling techniques, marketing strategies, styles of art and writing, and approaches to conventions« (Coogan 2006, 253). Dem herrschenden Konsens folgend beginnt das ›Golden Age of Comic Book Superheroes‹ mit dem Debüt von Superman in dem im Mai 1938 erscheinenden Anthologiecomic *Action Comics* #1 und klingt in den Nachkriegsjahren aus, bis der erste Auftritt des sogenannten ›Earth-1 Flash‹ in *Showcase* #4 (1956) das ›Silver Age‹ einläutet, eine Zeitperiode, in der »the idea of the superhero was clearly established, as evidenced by the existence of the term *superhero*« (Coogan 2006, 26, Herv. im Orig.), der 1958 erstmalig auf der Titelseite eines Comichefts zu lesen ist (vgl. Coogan 2006, 25).

Analog dazu ist im Zusammenhang mit zeitgenössischen Filmproduktionen, die auf dem geistigen Eigentum von Comicverlagen basieren, in der jüngeren Vergangenheit sowohl in der Filmkritik als auch im Diskurs der Comicforschung wiederholt die Rede von einem für das frühe 21. Jahrhundert diagnostizierten »golden age of comic book films« (Child 2010, o.S.) bzw. »golden age of comic book filmmaking« (Burke 2015, 23) oder »Goldenen Zeitalter der Comicfilme« (Sina 2016, 263), als dessen Katalysator Liam Burke den überraschenden kommerziellen Erfolg der 20th Century Fox / Marvel Studios-Koproduktion X-Men (2000) betrachtet: »When X-Men (Singer) opened to a $54 million weekend in the summer of 2000, it ushered in an era of unprecedented comic book adaptation productions by Hollywood studios« (Burke 2015, 5). Angesichts der Regelmäßigkeit, mit der um Superheld_innen zentrierte Filmproduktionen in den darauf folgenden Jahren Kinokassenrekorde brechen, fällt es zumindest aus ökonomischer Sicht leicht, den Zeitraum nach der Jahrtausendwende als ein Goldenes Zeitalter des *comic book film* bzw. Comicfilms zu verstehen. Mit einem Gesamtumsatz von weltweit mehr als $14 Mrd. ist das *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (MCU) seit 2014 das finanziell erfolgreichste Filmfranchise in der Geschichte Hollywoods. Sechs der zwischen 2008 und April 2018 erschienenen 19 Filme haben weltweit mehr als $1 Mrd. an den Kinokassen umgesetzt,

jeder der seit 2017 erschienenen Filme hat mehr als $800 Mio. eingespielt. Jenseits der reinen Umsätze brechen die von Marvel produzierten Filme regelmäßig Rekorde in nahezu sämtlichen von moderner Datenerhebung ermöglichten Kategorien. So besetzte Black Panther (2018) bereits kurz nach seinem US-Start im Februar 2018 die Spitzenposition in den Kategorien ›largest February opening Weekend‹, ›largest winter season opening weekend‹, ›largest President's Day weekend opening‹, ›largest monday‹ und ›largest Thursday preview gross in the month of February‹. Der von Black Panther aufgestellte Ticketvorverkaufsrekord wurde kurz darauf von Avengers: Infinity War gebrochen – dem 19. Kinofilm der MCU-Hyperserie, der weniger als zwei Monate nach seinem Kinostart die 2-Milliarden-Marke überschritten hat (vgl. BoxOfficeMojo). Über die finanzielle Dominanz der Marvel Studios-Filme hinaus hat das über den Verlauf von zehn Jahren etablierte Modell des hyperseriellen *Shared Cinematic Universe* zahlreiche Nachahmungsbemühungen motiviert. So kündigten im Jahr 2015 sämtliche Major Studios an, eigene, eng an das Erfolgsmodell Marvels angelehnte Cinematic Universes auf der Grundlage vorhandener oder zu diesem Zweck erworbener Franchises zu entwickeln (vgl. Vignold 2017, 7-8). Comicfilme wie die Marvel Studios-Produktionen sind also nicht nur aus ökonomischer Perspektive ›Gold‹, sondern üben darüber hinaus verstärkt Einfluss auf den Produktionsmodus von Franchisefilmen aus (vgl. Burke 2015, 4).

Verweilt man innerhalb der Logik der epochisierenden Strukturierung in diskrete Zeitalter, fällt es leicht, das Erscheinen von Marvel Studios' Iron Man (2008), dem ersten Film des *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, als Zäsur wahrzunehmen und die seitdem steigende Tendenz zur exzessiven Serialisierung von Comicfilmen als Indikator für ein mit diesem Film einsetzendes ›Silver Age of Comic Book Film‹ respektive ›silbernes Zeitalter des Comicfilms‹ zu interpretieren (vgl. Vignold 2017, 126). Wie sich im Verlauf der hier folgenden Argumentation zeigen wird, greift eine solche Reaktion jedoch zu kurz. Dies klingt bereits in der folgenden Begriffsunterscheindung zwischen *comic book film* im Sinne Ben Childs und Burkes und *Comicfilm* im Sinne Véronique Sinas an und wird im Zuge der hier ausgeführten Überlegungen zu verschiedenen Aspekten der Serialisierung von um Superheld_innen zentrierten Narrationen in den Medien Film und Fernsehen vertieft. Denn anstatt, wie hier mit Frank Kelleter und Daniel Stein (2012, 264) argumentiert werden soll, eine auf abgeschlossene Epochen und vermeintlich klare Zäsuren basierende Geschichtsschreibung anzustreben, ist es erkenntnisreicher, den Blick auf die Übergänge der zur Anwendung gebrachten Formen und Modi der Serialisierung zu richten.

Von der Comicverfilmung zum Comicfilm

Bereits aus dem Titel seiner Studie *The Comic Book Film Adaptation* (2015) wird ersichtlich, dass für Burke *comic book film* bzw. *comic book movie* mit Adaption gleichzusetzen ist, der Überführung eines medialen Texts in ein anderes Medium als dem seines krea-

tiven Ursprungs, in diesem Fall vom gedruckten Comic in die bewegten Bilder des Films. Burke bezieht sich dabei auf Thomas Leitch, der *Adaptationtheory* als »systematic study of films based on literary sources« betrachtet und dabei einen Fokus auf den »status of adaptations as examples of rewriting« (Leitch 2007, 21) legt. »Today, the comic book film adaptation has developed into a full-fledged genre: the comic book movie« (Burke 2015, 84). Aus dieser Perspektive heraus beschäftigen ihn die unterschiedlichen Modi der Adaption in den *comic book movies* des 21. Jahrhunderts, die auch an ästhetische Fragen des Transfers geknüpft sind, wohingegen ihn konkrete Fragen der spezifischen Medialität dieser Form der Adaption nur nachrangig interessieren. Im Rückgriff auf die von dem Filmtheoretiker Dudley Andrew vorgeschlagenen Modi der Relation zwischen Verfilmung und zugrundeliegendem Text unterscheidet auch Burke die von ihm untersuchten *comic book adaptations* in »borrowings«, »intersections« und »transformations« (Burke 2015, 13). Der Aspekt der Werktreue (»fidelty«) erhält in dieser Unterscheidung einen zentralen Stellenwert und geht seiner Argumentation folgend der Ankunft der digitalen Filmproduktion weit voraus. Der Wunsch nach Werktreue und einem semiotischen Lückenschluss zwischen Comic und Film sei schon in den 1960er Jahren ein Motor für Innovationen in der Filmtricktechnik gewesen, die von neu aufkommenden digitalen Technologien lediglich aktualisiert werde (vgl. Burke 2015, 49). Sein Verständnis des Phänomens *Comic Book Film Adaptation* verläuft damit deckungsgleich zu Susanne Marschalls Definition von Comicverfilmung als »Adaption gezeichneter Comicstrips oder Comic-Serien für das Medium Film« (Marschall, zit. nach Sina 2015, 22). Sina argumentiert jedoch in *Comic – Film – Gender. Zur (Re-)Medialisierung von Geschlecht im Comicfilm* (2015), dass für die auf Comics basierenden Filmproduktionen aus der zeitlichen Periode, die auch Burke betrachtet, unter anderem aufgrund der Fortschritte im Bereich der digitalen Filmtricktechnik, Animation und Postproduktion und den damit neu erworbenen Darstellungsmöglichkeiten nicht mehr das Paradigma der Adaption gelte, sondern das der Remedialisierung:

> Durch die filmische Remedialisierung comicspezifischer Elemente stellen diese Produktionen – so unterschiedlich sie zunächst auch scheinen mögen – eine Mediengrenzen überschreitende Repräsentationsform dar, die als ein (hyper-)mediales Ineinandergreifen von Comic und Film verstanden werden muss. Über die klassische Definition einer Comic*ver*filmung hinausreichend, demonstrieren diese Werke auf eindrückliche Weise das auf anhaltenden Remedialisierungsprozessen basierende Wechselverhältnis beider Medien (Sina 2015, 264, Herv. im Orig.).

Aus diesem Grund schlägt sie zur Abgrenzung der neuen Form gegen die alte den Begriff *Comicfilm* vor. Mit dieser Unterscheidung wird deutlich, dass Burke, Child und Sina sich zwar auf dieselbe zeitliche Periode beziehen, die sie als ein ›Goldenes Zeitalter‹ rahmen, nämlich die Zeit etwa seit der Jahrtausendwende. Jedoch setzen sie dieses ›Goldene Zeitalter‹ zu unterschiedlichen Entwicklungsstufen desselben Phänomens in Bezug: der

adaptierenden Comicverfilmung als Genre (Child, Burke) respektive dem Comicfilm als hypermedialer Form (Sina). Diese Unterscheidung ist deshalb relevant, weil Comicfilm ein vergleichsweise junges Phänomen ist, das von digitaler Filmproduktion abhängt und etwa um die Jahrtausendwende herum einsetzt, wohingegen Comicverfilmungen sich bereits zur Zeit des Zweites Weltkrieges großer Beliebtheit bei ihrem jugendlichen Zielpublikum erfreuen und damit das *Golden Age of Comic Books* indirekt mitkonstituieren. So vollziehen beispielsweise mit The Batman (1943) und Captain America (1944) zwei zu dieser Zeit schon populäre Comic-Superhelden recht bald nach ihren Print-Debüts den Medienwechsel in wöchentliche Filmserials für das Kino und setzen ihre Medienkarrieren in den Folgejahrzehnten mit unterschiedlichem Erfolg im Fernsehen fort, bevor sie 1989 bzw. 1990 für das Kino reaktiviert werden. Beide Figuren blicken also bereits auf eine Film-/TV-Geschichte von mehr als sechs Jahrzehnten zurück, wenn sie beginnend Mitte der 2000er Jahre als Protagonisten hoch budgetierter Comicfilm-Franchises auf die Leinwand zurückkehren. Vor dem Hintergrund der zeitlichen Differenz zwischen der Emergenz von Comicverfilmung und Comicfilm erscheint der Widerspruch im zeitgleichen Verkünden eines ›Goldenen Zeitalter der Comicverfilmung‹ und einem ›Goldenen Zeitalter des Comicfilms‹, denn Comicverfilmung und Comicfilm bilden ein Kontinuum, in dessen Verlauf die alte Form von der neuen überschrieben wird. Sowohl bezogen auf Comicverfilmung als auch Comicfilm droht die Proklamation eines mit der Jahrtausendwende beginnenden goldenen Zeitalters die in den 1940ern beginnende Geschichte der Comicadaption in audiovisuellen Medien in den nachrangigen Status einer teleologischen Vorgeschichte zu relegieren, eines erst mit dem Erscheinen von X-Men im Jahr 2000 abgeschlossenen ästhetischen Werdungsprozesses.[1]

Eine wesentliche Gemeinsamkeit zeitgenössischer Comicfilme, die weder bei Burke noch bei Sina schwerpunktmäßige Beachtung findet, ist die Tendenz zur Serialisierung,[2] die gegenwärtig in Gestalt von Hyperserien wie dem X-Men-Franchise, dem *Marvel Cinematic Universe* oder dem *DC Extended Universe* (DCEU)[3] – multilinear, mitunter transmedial, erzählten Serien-in-Serie, deren Narrationen sich über die Grenzen der einzelnen Serien hinaus vernetzen (vgl. Vignold 2017, 8f.) – erkennbar wird. Ist sowohl der Begriff der *Comicverfilmung* als auch des *Comicfilms* von einem Verständnis von Film als Einzelwerk informiert,[4] fordert ein Film wie der von Marvel Studios / Disney produzierte Captain America: Civil War (2016) trotz der von einem Event-Blockbuster üblicherweise eingeforderten inhaltlichen Kohärenz und Geschlossenheit ein vergleichsweise hohes Vorwissen von seinem Zielpublikum ein, da er nicht nur den Abschluss der 2011 begonnenen Captain America-Trilogie darstellt, sondern inhaltlich ebenso an die Avengers-Filme (2012/2015) und die bereits abgeschlossene Iron Man-Trilogie (2008/2010/2013) anknüpft. War die »idea of the superhero« für Peter Coogan zum Auftakt des *Silver Age of Comic Books* »clearly established«, kann diese Behauptung spätestens mit dem kommerziellen Erfolg von Civil War

für den zeitgenössischen Comicfilm und das Kinopublikum wiederholt werden: trotz seiner vergleichsweise hohen narrativen Einstiegshürde (verglichen mit einem die Ursprungsgeschichte einer neuen Figur narrativisierenden *origin movie*), ist der Film mit einem weltweiten Einspielergebnis von über $1,15 Mrd. der derzeit vierterfolgreichste der bis März 2018 unter dem MCU-Banner veröffentlichten Filme und die dritterfolgreichste Hollywood-Produktion des Jahres 2016 (US-Territorien lt. *Box Office Mojo*). Das weltweite Kinopublikum, dessen Kaufkraft das MCU seit Jahren an der Spitze der erfolgreichsten Hollywood-Franchises hält, weiß nicht nur längst sehr genau, was Superheld_innen sind, sondern ist in mehrerlei Hinsicht und mitunter seit Jahren tief in deren Geschichten investiert.

Anstatt sich an dieser Stelle in der Frage zu verlaufen, was dies für die deklarierte Epoche des ›Goldenen Zeitalter der Comicfilme‹ und den möglicherweise bereits vollzogenen Wechsel in ein *Silver Age* (oder vielleicht gar darüber hinaus) bedeutet, scheint es sinnvoller, den Fokus auf Serialisierungspraktiken zu legen. Im Nachvollzug des Wegs von der Comicverfilmung als *chapter serial* zum hyperseriellen, in *shared cinematic universes* organisierten Comicfilm inklusive der Umwege über das Fernsehen soll anhand der medialen Transfers der Figuren Batman und Captain America eine Verortung des zeitgenössischen Comicfilms jenseits eines auf Zäsuren fixierten Epochendenkens ermöglichet werden. Dies geschieht im Anschluss an Kelleters und Steins Überlegungen zur Entwicklung von Serialitätsformen in US-amerikanischen Superheldencomics (2012), unter Zuhilfenahme des von Christian Junklewitz und Tanja Weber (2008) vorgeschlagenen Analysekriterium der intraserialen Kohärenz sowie unter Rückgriff auf Shane Denson und Ruth Mayers Unterscheidung zwischen serieller Figur und Seriencharakter (2012) und soll den Blick weg von vermeintlichen Brüchen hin auf drei Übergänge richten: von linearer zu multilinearer Serialität, von intraserialer zu interserieller Kohärenz sowie von seriellen Figuren zu Seriencharakteren.

Vom Chapter Serial zur Hyperserie

Kelleter und Stein stellen den auch bei Coogan anzutreffenden »Fan-Epochisierungen« (Kelleter/Stein 2012, 264) in aufeinanderfolgende, voneinander abgegrenzte *Ages of Comic Books* bzw. *Ages of Comic Superheros* ein evolutionäres Modell der seriellen Gattungsgenese entgegen, das sie entlang des Komplexitätsanstiegs von Serialisierungsformen in US-amerikanischen Superheldencomics entwickeln und anhand dessen sie den Wandel »von linearen narrativen Welten über parallele und konvergierende Multiversen zu den so genannten Metaversen der Gegenwart« (Kelleter/Stein 2012, 261) nachvollziehen. Während der Beginn des ›Silver Age of Comics‹ auf den ›Reboot‹[5] der Figur The Flash im Jahr 1954 datiert wird, stellen Kelleter und Stein fest, dass noch bis in die späten 1960er Jahre hinein »professionell hergestellte Serien mit einfachen Episoden- oder Fortsetzungsstrukturen« (Kelleter/Stein

2012, 264) und einem nur gering ausgeprägten, höchstens über abgeschlossene Mehrteiler hinweg reichenden narrativen Gedächtnis ausgestattet, die dominante Form darstellen.[6]

Der Übergang von linearer zu multilinearer Serialität zwischen den 1960er und 1970er Jahren entfaltet sich in zwei Dimensionen, nämlich sowohl hinsichtlich »der Diversifizierung seriellen Erzählens« als auch einer »Multiplizierung serieller Formate« (beide Kelleter/Stein 2012, 274):

> Neben die bis dato meist episodischen oder oneirischen Erzählstrukturen treten nun längere Handlungsstränge über mehrere Ausgaben und immer komplexere Figurenkonstellationen. Um die Gesamtentwicklung einer Serienfigur verfolgen zu können, müssen Leser fortan auch Hefte anderer Serienfiguren oder Figurenteams kaufen, denn alle Ereignisse finden in einem übergreifenden Marvel-Universum statt (angesiedelt in New York), das sich über mehrere synchron verlaufende Serien erstreckt und Figurenübergänge zwischen einzelnen Serien erlaubt. (Kelleter/Stein 2012, 274f.)

Darüber hinaus erscheinen ab den 1970er Jahren besonders populäre Figuren regelmäßig in mehr als einer eigenen monatlichen Serie, die mitunter unterschiedliche Altersgruppen adressieren, werden in wechselnden *Team-Ups* kombiniert, oder treten in spekulativen *What If?*-Szenarien auf, deren Ereignisse keine Auswirkungen auf die Kontinuität des Marvel Universe haben. Diese von Kelleter und Stein dargelegte Bewegung einer mehrdimensionalen Ausdifferenzierung seriellen Erzählens lässt sich auf unterschiedliche Weise in den individuellen audiovisuellen Mediengeschichten der exemplarisch gewählten Figuren Batman (DC Comics, erster Auftritt in *Detective Comics* #27, 1939) und Captain America (Marvel Comics, erster Auftritt in *Captain America* #1, 1943) nachvollziehen.

Um dies zu ermöglichen, sollen zwei Modelle in Betracht gezogen werden, die es erlauben, unterschiedliche Serialisierungsformen in aufeinander bezogener Weise zu skalieren. Weber und Junklewitz (2008) verweisen zu diesem Zweck auf die intraseriale Kohärenz einer Serienerzählung, die zwischen den beiden idealtypischen Polen der abgeschlossen erzählenden Episodenserie und der potenziell endlosen Fortsetzungsserie ansteigt. Sie bemessen diesen Anstieg anhand der Kontinuität des Figurenensembles – wöchentlich wechselnd wie in einer Anthologieserie (niedrig) bis hin zu den konstant bleibenden Haupt- und Nebenfigurenensembles von sogenannten Endlosserien (hoch) – sowie anhand des quantitativen Verhältnisses fortgesetzt erzählender und abgeschlossener Folgen (Fortsetzungsdichte) im Verhältnis zu der Distanz, über die sich Handlungsbögen erstrecken (Fortsetzungsreichweite).[7]

Denson und Mayer (2012) führen eine weitere Unterscheidung ein, die den Fokus vom Ensemble auf die einzelnen Figuren rückt. Sie differenzieren zwischen zwei »unterschiedlichen Arten serieller Existenz« (Denson/Mayer 2012, 197): seriellen Figuren und Seriencharakteren. Serielle Figuren streuen sich über verschiedene Medien und sind in besonderer Weise dafür geeignet, die Vorzüge eines neuen Mediums hervorzuheben. Bezugnehmend auf Umberto Ecos einschlägigen Aufsatz *Der Mythos von Superman* beschreiben sie serielle Figuren als narrativ flach und in ständige Wiederholungen eingebunden: Sie erfahren in jeder Inszenierung

einen Neuanfang, in dem vergangene Ereignisse folgenlos geblieben sind (vgl. Denson/Mayer 2012, 187), erlangen aber auf diesem Weg »die Fähigkeit, sich gänzlich vom diegetischen Konstrukt einer narrativen Welt, von den damit verbundenen Kontinuitätsansprüchen und sogar von den Medien, die fiktive Welten anderenfalls unsichtbar konstruieren, zu lösen (Denson/Mayer 2012, 190). Gleichzeitig ist diese Flachheit jedoch auch Voraussetzung dafür, serielle Figuren in immer wieder neuen medialen und narrativen Kontexten zu inszenieren und mittels dieser Inszenierung die innovativen Aspekte eines neuen Mediums selbst zu thematisieren. Als Beispiel nennen sie unter anderem die Tarzan-Filme mit Johnny Weissmüller. Der ikonische Schrei Tarzans, der den Innovationsgrad des damals neuen Mediums Tonfilm repräsentiert, trägt seinen Teil dazu bei, dass die Figur trotz ihres literarischen Ursprungs ab den 1930er Jahren in der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung nahezu untrennbar mit dem sie darstellenden Schauspieler verbunden ist und auf diesem Wege selbst Ikonizität erlangt (vgl. Denson/Mayer 2012, 190-191).

Seriencharaktere stellen quasi den Gegenentwurf dazu dar und erhalten im Zuge länger laufender, im Sinne von Weber und Junklewitz intraserial kohärenter Narrationen eine biografische Ausprägung, die deutlich dynamischer verläuft als beispielsweise die typischerweise starr bleibenden Charakterisierungen von Sitcom-Figuren: »Seriencharaktere gewinnen im Lauf ihrer narrativen Entwicklung im Allgemeinen an psychologischer Tiefe, sie werden oft mit komplexen Biografien oder verzweigten Familiengeschichten ausgestattet und sind primär im Blick auf ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Weiterentwicklung interessant« (Denson/Mayer 2012, 187). Üblicherweise verbleibt die Erzählung, innerhalb derer sich ein Seriencharakter entwickelt, innerhalb der hermetischen Diegese ihrer Serie und damit innerhalb desselben Mediums. Sie betonen jedoch auch, dass *serielle Figur* und *Seriencharakter* keine dichotomen Zustände darstellen, sondern mit zunehmender Komplexität von Serienerzählungen ineinander übergehen können.[8]

Batman in Film und TV des 20. Jahrhunderts

Will Brooker (2001) zufolge sind es sechs konstant bleibende Bedingungen, die das *basic template* der Figur Batman definieren: »Batman is Bruce Wayne, a millionaire who dresses in a bat-costume and fights crime« (42); »He has no special powers but is very fit and strong, and very intelligent« (46); »He lives in Gotham City« (47); »He fights villains like the Joker« (49); »He fights crime because his parents were killed when he was young« (53); »He is often helped by his sidekick, Robin« (56). Diese Bedingungen müssen in ausreichender Zahl erfüllt sein, um die Identifikation einer Figur als Batman zu gewährleisten, dazwischen eröffnen sich jedoch zahlreiche Spielräume für Variationen, die seit dem ersten Erscheinen Batmans in *Detective Comics* #29 (1939) konstant erweitert wurden. Über den Verlauf der bis heute

andauernden Medienkarriere Batmans entwickelt sich ein diskursives, dichotomes Spektrum zwischen zwei ikonisch gewordenen Rezeptionen der Figur. Der als in der Tradition seiner Schöpfer Bob Kane und Bill Finger stehend betrachtete »grim crime fighter driven by an obsession born of tragedy« (Cotta Vaz in Brooker 2001, 174), bildet hier ein Ende des Spektrums, an dem sich die regelmäßig als ›dark‹ bezeichneten Interpretationen von Frank Miller (*The Dark Knight Returns*, *Batman: Year One*) oder Alan Moore (*The Killing Joke*) ebenso ansiedeln wie die von Tim Burton (Batman [1989], Batman Returns [1992]), Christopher Nolan (Dark Knight-Trilogie [2005-2012]) und Zack Snyder (Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice [2016], Justice League [2017]) inszenierten Kinofilme. Das entgegengesetzte Ende des Spektrums konstituiert sich aus der ›Pop-Ikone‹ Batman als Teil des Camp-Diskurses,[9] dem sowohl die ABC-Serie der 1960er Jahre samt begleitendem Kinofilm als auch die beiden von Joel Schumacher inszenierten Filme der ersten Warner-Cineserie (Batman Forever [1995], Batman & Robin [1997]) zugerechnet werden. Peter Sanderson (2010, 28) weist darauf hin, dass die Batman-Comics der späten 1950er und frühen 1960er Jahre im Vergleich zu dem »dark crime melodrama the series had been when it debuted in 1939« bereits »much sillier« (Sanderson 2010, 29) geworden seien und schon in dieser Phase einige ästhetische Komponenten aber auch Handlungsstränge der späteren TV-Serie etablierten.[10] Die Serie und ihre Darstellung der Titelfigur durch Adam West konstituiert für viele Jahre »the predominant image [of Batman] in the mind of the general, non-comics-reading public« (Brooker 2001, 171), stellt gleichzeitig jedoch noch für kommende Jahrzehnte einen Abgrenzungspunkt dar, von dem es sich für die Vertreter_innen der ›dunklen Seite‹ des Spektrums explizit zu distanzieren gilt (vgl. Brooker 2001, 172-174). Zwischen diesen beiden Polen entspannt sich ein weites Mittelfeld, innerhalb dessen sich die serielle Figur Batman nicht auf eine Bedeutung fixieren lässt, sondern unterschiedlich konstruiert wird, obwohl sie im Sinne der von Brooker benannten Bedingungen stets unverwechselbar Batman bleibt.

Innerhalb dieses Spektrums unterscheiden sich die Realfilm-Adaptionen des Batman-Sujets – zwei über 15 Wochen laufende Filmserials von 1943 und 1949, eine 120-teilige TV-Serie (1966–1968) und eine aus vier Filmen bestehende Event-Blockbuster-Cineserie (1989, 1991, 1995, 1997) – ästhetisch sehr deutlich voneinander. Sie ähneln sich jedoch bezüglich der von ihnen zur Anwendung gebrachten Serialisierungsstrukturen, da es sich hier um einfache Fortsetzungsstrukturen und abgeschlossene Episoden handelt, keine der Serien über ein sonderlich stark ausgeprägtes narratives Gedächtnis verfügt oder ihre Figuren über den Verlauf der jeweiligen Serie nennenswert entwickelt. Den beiden 15-teiligen Filmserials können noch am ehesten ein gewisses Maß an Fortsetzungsdichte und Fortsetzungsreichweite attestiert werden, da sich deren jeweilige Handlung bei aller für Serials typischer, künstlicher Verzögerung kontinuierlich zielorientiert voran bewegt. Betrachtet man jedoch The Batman (1943) und The New Adventures of Batman and Robin (1949) jeweils in ihrer Gänze als

zwei Einträge einer Serie, tendieren Fortsetzungsdichte und -reichweite gegen Null. Obwohl Cast und Crew zwischen beiden Columbia-Serials vollständig gewechselt haben und diese in zahlreichen Aspekten so stark voneinander abweichen, dass man aus heutiger Sicht auch von einem *franchise reboot* sprechen könnte, wurde The New Adventures bereits qua Titel als Sequel vermarktet.[11] The New Adventures etabliert neue Nebenfiguren und einen neuen *villain*, inhaltliche Bezüge zum Vorgänger werden unterlassen. Ganz im Sinne des Umfeldes einer flachen seriellen Figur nach Denson und Mayer eröffnet das zweite Columbia-Serial einen »›scheinbaren Anfang‹, der den ›Endpunkt des vorangegangenen Ereignisses außer Acht lässt‹« (Denson/Mayer 2012, 187).

Ähnlich verhält es sich bei der ab 1966 ausgestrahlten TV-Serie, die zwar zwei Staffeln lang überwiegend in Doppelfolgen organisiert ist und später dazu übergeht, nach dem Abschluss der Haupthandlung in einer letzten Szene die Ereignisse der kommenden Episode in Aussicht zu stellen und auf diese Weise Kontinuität bzw. ein gewisses Maß an intraserialer Kohärenz zu suggerieren. Dennoch ist Batman (TV) keine kumulativ erzählte Fortsetzungsserie, sondern verteilt eine abgeschlossene, austauschbare Narration auf zwei (in Ausnahmefällen drei) Folgen, die an aufeinanderfolgenden Abenden derselben Woche ausgestrahlt werden. In der Tradition der parodierten Filmserials endet die jeweils erste Folge eines Zweiteilers mit einem Cliffhanger, der zu Beginn der, in der Regel am nächsten Abend (»same Bat-time, same Bat-channel«) ausgestrahlten Fortsetzung, aufgelöst wird. Die abschließende Folge eines Mehrteilers stellt der letzten Szene ein »Next Week«-Segment hintenan, das den Villain der kommenden Woche ankündigt. Zusammengehörige Folgen weisen bereits im Titel auf ihren inhaltlichen Zusammenhang hin, denn sie bilden nacheinander gelesen Paarreime, z.B. »Fine Feathered Finks«/»The Penguin's a Jinx« (Staffel 1, Ep. 3/4) oder »The Zodiac Crimes«/»The Joker's Hard Times«/»The Penguin Declines« (Staffel 2, Ep. 37/38/39). Passend dazu setzt das hauptsächlich zur Bewerbung der TV-Serie in Territorien außerhalb der USA produzierte Kino-Spin-Off Batman: The Movie (USA 1966) keine Kenntnis der TV-Serie voraus und fügt dieser nichts hinzu. Intraseriale Kohärenz zwischen Serie und Film sowie den Serienepisoden untereinander wird in erster Linie durch die Kontinuität des Figurenpersonals erzeugt, geht narrativ jedoch nicht über den Zusammenhang einer Doppel-/Tripelfolge hinaus. Staffel- bzw. serienübergreifende Handlungsbögen, wie sie ab den 1980er Jahren bis in die Gegenwart stetig populärer werdenden, kumulativ erzählenden TV-Serien aufzufinden sind, gibt es in Batman (TV) nicht.[12]

Warner akquiriert DC Comics im Jahr 1971, benötigt aber bis 1989 für die Produktion eines Batman-Films, mit dem die Figur nach den Maßgaben der Event-Blockbuster-Strategie und begleitet von einem bis dahin ungesehenen Marketingaufwand vom Fernsehen zurück auf die Leinwand gebracht wird. Batman (1989) folgen drei weitere Filme mit entsprechend höherem Materialaufwand, die als Sequels vermarktet werden (und gegenwärtig in gemeinsamen Box-Sets für den Heimmarkt ausgewertet werden), und abgesehen vom Stammperso-

nal und dem gemeinsamen Setting Gotham City keine nennenswerten narrativen Überschneidungen aufweisen. Die vierteilige Cineserie ist von häufigen Besetzungswechseln der Titelfigur gekennzeichnet, darüber hinaus lokalisiert sich zwischen dem von Tim Burton inszenierten Batman Returns und Joel Schumachers Batman Forever ein gravierender ästhetischer Umbruch: »the Batman franchise fizzled into camp after two films« (Coogan 2006, 1). Burton, so argumentiert Brooker (2001, 290), sei »really not concerned with its source material or with fidelity to any ›original‹«, sondern adaptiere anstelle einer konkret benennbaren Vorlage den in den späten 1980ern durch *The Dark Knight Returns* und *The Killing Joke* geprägten Diskurs über den »comic book Batman into the medium of cinema: ›dark‹, ›adult‹, ›serious‹ and defined against the TV show« (Brooker 2001, 290). Gleichzeitig fallen Batman und die Sequels in eine Kategorie, die Geoff King als ›theme park movies‹ versteht: »a set of overdesigned, hermetically sealed, totalizing environments masquerading as movies« (King 2000, 180), die nicht mehr nur als filmische Narration zu funktionieren haben, sondern daraufhin produziert werden, als Freizeitparkattraktionen – sogenannte *Theme Park Rides* – adaptiert werden zu können. So eröffnete beispielsweise im Jahr nach der Veröffentlichung von Ron Howards Backdraft (1991) eine gleichnamige, begehbare, videounterstützte Feuershow in den Originalsets des Films in den Universal Studios Hollywood (Abb. 1), die erst im April 2011 durch *Transformers: The Ride 3D* ersetzt wurde.

Abb. 1: Backdraft-Themepark Ride (Universal Studios).

Die beiden von Joel Schumacher inszenierten, häufig als ›toy commercials‹ diskreditierten Filme[13] jedoch »were not Tim Burton films, they were not ›dark‹, they were not a world away from the TV show; they were not played ›straight‹« (Brooker 2001, 294). Wie in den Columbia-Serials und der TV-Serie ist Batman in den Schumacher-Filmen erneut mit seinem Sidekick Robin gepaart, was im Verbund mit der deutlich farbenfroheren Ästhetik zu einer Reaktivierung des Camp-Diskurses führt. Werden die vier Filme also als Teile derselbe Cineserie gefasst, sind diese präziser als zwei mal zwei Episoden zu fassen, die abseits einer gewissen personellen Kontinuität keine Fortsetzungsdichte oder -reichweite ausbilden. Anders als die typischen *origin stories*, in denen die Entstehungsgeschichte einer Superheldenfigur narrativisiert wird (vgl. hierzu Coogan, 44), deutet Batman diese nur in kurzen Rückblenden an, zeigt seine Titelfigur zu Beginn ihrer Karriere als Vigilant und widmet sich stattdessen der mit Waynes Biographie verstrickten Genese seines ikonischen Antagonisten, dem Joker. Im Epilog des Films wird das ikonische *Bat-Signal* enthüllt, das gegen Ende der Exposition des Sequels Batman Returns den ersten Auftritt

Abb. 2: Batsignal in Batman Returns.

der Titelfigur signalisiert und so zu einem Serialitätsmarker wird (Abb. 2); über Kulisse, Personal und Props hinaus betreiben die abgeschlossenen Narrationen keine Vernetzung. Auch Batman Forever ignoriert die Narrationen der Vorgänger, führt jedoch mit Batmans Sidekick Robin eine Nebenfigur ein, die ihn auch im folgenden Film unterstützt. Beide Filme beginnen mit einer *hero montage*, die Batman bzw. Batman und Robin in schnell montierten Close-Ups beim Anlegen ihrer Ausrüstung zeigen und gehen dann *in medias res*; sie serialisieren sich auf dem Weg der Wiederholung. Während die Titelrolle der Serie zweimal umbesetzt wird (nach zwei Filmen mit Michael Keaton übernehmen nacheinander Val Kilmer und George Clooney die Rolle von Bruce Wayne/Batman), sind es zwei Nebendarsteller, die über alle vier Filme konstant bleiben und auf diesem Wege einen Zusammenhalt zwischen allen vier Filmen suggerieren: Michael Glough (als Waynes Butler Alfred Pennyworth) und Pat Hingle (als Polizeichef James Gordon). Der finanzielle und kritische Misserfolg trägt dazu bei, dass Pläne für einen fünften Teil fallen gelassen werden (vgl. Brooker 2001, 307) und Warner das Franchise stattdessen im Jahr 2005 einem *reboot* unterzieht.

Captain America in Film und TV des 20. Jahrhunderts

Die Geschichte der Live-Action-Adaptionen von Captain America im 20. Jahrhundert verläuft über dieselben Stationen wie die von Batman, gestaltet sich jedoch weniger umfang-

reich. Wie Batman debütiert auch Captain America bereits 1944, nur drei Jahre nach seinem ersten Erscheinen in *Captain America Comics* #1 (März 1941), in einem Filmserial und ist damit der erste Marvel-Charakter, der einen Medienwechsel vom Comic in den Film vollzieht. In den späten 1970er Jahren ist die Figur gemeinsam mit The Amazing Spider-Man (1977-1979), The Incredible Hulk (1978-1982) und Dr. Strange (1978) auf dem Sender CBS zu sehen, geht jedoch nicht in Serie. 1984 kauft die auf low-/mid-budget-Produktionen spezialisierte Cannon Group die Filmrechte an der Figur auf und kündigt noch im selben Jahr in ganzseitigen Anzeigen in *Variety* einen entsprechenden Film an, der jedoch erst 1990 erscheint und ohne Umweg über das Kino direkt für den Heimvideomarkt ausgewertet wird.

Wurde in den frühen Batman-Adaptionen eine Identität der Filmfigur mit der Comicfigur unter anderem über den Weg der Namensgleichheit suggeriert, nehmen sich die ersten Realfilmadaptionen von Captain America dahingehend größere Freiheiten. So ignoriert das Republic-Serial Captain America (1944) den von den Comics vorgezeichneten Ursprung der Figur, ihr propagandistisches Setting und das sie umgebende Ensemble ebenso wie ihren Namen. Statt des zu militärischen Zwecken genetisch modifizierten Supersoldaten Steve Rogers, der mit seinem Sidekick James ›Bucky‹ Barnes vor dem Hintergrund des Zweiten Weltkriegs operiert, ist Captain America im Filmserial die Geheimidentität des Staatsanwalts Grant Gardener, der ohne über außergewöhnliche Fähigkeiten zu verfügen auf eigene Faust das Verbrechen bekämpft. David Ray Carter (2016, 131) argumentiert, »Columbia's 1943 Serial Batman changed the character to essentially be Captain America«. Es ließe sich analog dazu argumentieren, dass der Captain America des Republic-Serials ebenso deutliche Züge von Batman trägt. Noch deutlicher als bei Batman zeigt sich die Flachheit der Figur, die für die Zwecke einer seriellen Filmerzählung neu definiert, im Zuge der handlungszielorientierten Narration jedoch charakterlich kaum ausgestaltet wird. Wie Batman ist auch Captain America (1944) eine einfach strukturierte Fortsetzungsgeschichte.

Ende der 1970er Jahre lizensiert Marvel einige ihrer Figuren an den Fernsehsender CBS, der zwischen 1977 und 1979 eine Reihe von Pilotfilmen produziert, darunter Captain America und die an zwei aufeinanderfolgenden Abenden ausgestrahlte Doppelfolge in Spielfilmlänge Captain America II: Death Too Soon. In einem Versuch der Modernisierung lagert die TV-Serie die in die 1940er zurückreichende Publikationsgeschichte der Figur auf den Vater des dennoch Steve Rogers benannten Protagonisten (in beiden Filmen gespielt von Reb Brown) aus, der zu Beginn des Pilotfilms das Leben eines in einem Van durch die Lande kreuzenden Künstlers mit militärischer Vergangenheit führt, erst gegen Ende die Uniform seines Vaters annimmt und sich damit dessen Heldenidentität aneignet. Die später im selben Jahr an zwei Abenden ausgestrahlte und nachträglich für den Heimvideomarkt als Spielfilm umgeschnittene Doppelfolge Death Too Soon greift die Prämisse des Pilotfilms auf, steht zu diesem jedoch in keinem expliziten inhaltlichen Zusammenhang.

Die von ihrer schwierigen Produktionsgeschichte und im Endresultat sichtbaren Budget-

kürzungen gekennzeichnete Realverfilmung Captain America von 21. Century Pictures vermag es ebenfalls trotz dahingehend zweifellos bestehender Ambitionen ebenfalls nicht, in Serie zu gehen. Es bleibt bei einem *standalonefilm*, der – so David Ray Carters (2016, 136) Urteil – »more faithful to the comics than its predecessors« ist, da er zahlreiche ästhetische und narrative Schlüsselelemente wie den *origin* der Figur, ihr Kostüm, das Weltkriegs-Setting und ihren Antagonisten Red Skull korrekt übernimmt.[14] Der Film wird wiederum als Comic adaptiert, hat aber über diesen *One-Shot* hinaus keine ästhetischen oder narrativen Auswirkungen auf die laufenden *Captain America*-Comicserien.

Die Dark Knight-Trilogie: Batman und der Comicfilm

Der von Christopher Nolan inszenierte Batman-Reboot Batman Begins (2005), Auftakt der bis 2012 laufenden Dark Knight-Trilogie, erscheint, als der »post-X-Men boom« (Burke 2015, 14) bereits wieder abebbt. Zwischen 1998 und 2005 erscheinen 13 von unterschiedlichen Studios produzierte Filme auf der Grundlage von Marvel-Figuren wie Blade, Spider-Man, den Fantastic Four oder den X-Men. In dieser Zeit realisiert sich am sichtbarsten die ästhetische Verschiebung, die mit Sina als Übergang zum hypermedialen Comicfilm zu fassen ist. Höhere Budgets und Fortschritte in der (digitalen) Filmtricktechnik ermöglichen »den erfolgreichen Transfer sowohl inhaltlicher als auch formal-ästhetischer Aspekte vom Medium Comic zum Medium Film« (Sina 2016, 264) und erlauben es, die übernatürlichen Fähigkeiten der Superheld_innen in einer Weise zu inszenieren, die zuvor schlicht nicht realisierbar war. Blade (1998) von New Line, X-Men von 20th Century Fox und Spider-Man (2002) von Columbia erweisen sich als kommerzielle Erfolge und werden in Trilogieform fortgesetzt, das kritische und kommerzielle Scheitern von Elektra (2005) und Man-Thing (2005) soll jedoch seinen Anteil daran gehabt haben, dass Marvel sich aus dem Lizensierungsgeschäft zurückzieht und ein Filmstudio gründet. Ein weiterer Grund hierfür liegt darin, dass es die Rechtesituation erschwert bis verunmöglicht, *cross-promotion* zwischen den Filmserien der konkurrierenden Filmstudios zu etablieren (vgl. Vignold 2017, 57-60). So verbleiben Blade, Spider-Man und die X-Men innerhalb der Grenzen der jeweiligen Diegesen ihrer linear strukturierten Filmserien, wohingegen sie sich in den innerhalb eines gemeinsamen Marvel Universe verorteten multilinearen Comicserien regelmäßig über den Weg laufen »wie Arbeitskollegen oder alte Bekannte« (Rauscher 2014, 2).

In dieser von Marvel dominierten Zeit geht die Produktion von DC-basierten Filmen bei Warner nur schleppend voran. Erst 2004 erscheint nach langen Jahren in der *productionhell* Catwoman (2004), ursprünglich als Batman Returns-Spin-Off unter der Regie von Tim Burton konzipiert, fällt jedoch bei Publikum und Kritik gleichermaßen durch. Der im folgenden Jahr erscheinende Batman Begins (2005), produziert für $150 Mio., bricht mit der

Camp-Ästhetik der inzwischen in Verruf geratenen Schumacher-Filme[15] via einer »infusion of realism and violence« (Scahill 2016, 317) und erkundet in einer Neuerzählung ihrer Entstehungsgeschichte die psychologische Motivation der Figur.

Die mit zahlreichen Zeitsprüngen verschachtelt konstruierte Variation auf Campbells (2004) *Heldenreise* widmet sich bis zum actionlastigen dritten Akt einer narrativen Biografisierung der Titelfigur und legt sie bereits als Seriencharakter an. Den im Titel des Films zur Schau gestellten Willen zur Serialisierung unterstreicht die Epilogszene des Films, in der in einem subtiler inszenierten Echo der »Next Week«-Einspieler der Batman-TV-Serie in Form einer Joker-Spielkarte der Antagonist einer potenziellen Fortsetzung angedeutet wird – gefolgt von der erstmaligen Einblendung des Titels auf schwarzem Hintergrund. Obwohl – vergleichbar mit der Logik eines TV-Pilots – im Epilog die narrative Prämisse gesetzt ist, mit der eine potenziell endlose Serialisierung möglich wird, platzieren sich The Dark Knight (2008) und The Dark Knight Rises (2012) als Mitte und Ende einer zielorientiert erzählten Trilogie, deren kontinuierliches Figurenensemble und über alle drei Filme verzweigte Handlungsstränge (*arcs*)[16] in einem deutlichen Anstieg der Fortsetzungsdichte und -reichweite im Vergleich zu den episodischen Batman-Sequels der 1990er Jahre resultiert. Dennoch ist auch die Nolan-Trilogie noch als lineare Serie zu fassen, in der Batman nicht wie in den Comics üblich Teil eines von zahlreichen Superheld_innen bevölkerten *DC Universums* ist, sondern in ebensolcher Weise von seiner filmischen Diegese begrenzt ist wie die Protagonist_innen der Marvel-Trilogien. Im selben Jahr, in dem Warner die Dark Knight-Trilogie zu ihrem Abschluss bringt, erscheint mit Marvel's The Avengers ein Ensemble-Crossover-Film, mit dem Marvel Studios seine Strategie einer multilinear organisierten, narrativ komplexen Kinoserie endgültig etabliert und die Blaupause für zukünftige Filmfranchises entwirft.

Captain America im Marvel Cinematic Universe

Die Behauptung, dass Captain America zwischen 2011 und 2017 Titelfigur einer intraseriell kohärenten Filmtrilogie mit hoher Fortsetzungsdichte und -reichweite ist, die in vielerlei Hinsicht unter dem Einfluss von Nolans Dark Knight-Trilogie steht, ist nicht grundsätzlich falsch, greift aber an entscheidender Stelle zu kurz. Zwar entwickeln Captain America: The First Avenger (2011), Captain America: The Winter Soldier (USA 2014) und Captain America: Civil War (2017) im Stil einer Saga in drei Akten Handlungsstränge und Charakterentwicklungen von Haupt- und Nebenfiguren kontinuierlich weiter und bringen sie zu einem (zumindest vorläufigen) Abschluss. Wie die Dark-Knight-Filme zeigt auch die Captain America-Trilogie, wie der Protagonist die Identität des Helden annimmt (1. Film) und schließlich wieder ablegt (3. Film). Der über drei Filme entwickelte *character arc* thematisiert kontinuierlich die Rolle des Kriegshelden der 1940er Jahre innerhalb des Staatsapparats des

21. Jahrhunderts und arbeitet sich an der Beziehung des Protagonisten zu seinem Jugendfreund James ›Bucky‹ Barnes ab. In dem *origin movie* The First Avenger stirbt Barnes augenscheinlich bei einem Einsatz während des Zweiten Weltkrieges. In The Winter Soldier wird offenbart, dass Barnes Opfer eines Gehirnwäsche-Experiments geworden ist und seit seinem vermeintlichen Ableben als willenloser Auftragskiller missbraucht wird. Civil War thematisiert Rogers Versuch, den mittlerweile international gesuchten Barnes zu retten. Am Ende von Civil War legt Rogers seinen ikonischen Schild und damit die Captain America-Identität nieder, Barnes findet Asyl im afrikanischen Wakanda, wo er von den Nachwirkungen der Gehirnwäsche kuriert werden soll. Auch wenn beide Figuren damit keineswegs auserzählt sind – sie sind Teil des Ensembles von Avengers: Infinity War (2018) – findet der über alle drei Filme entwickelte Handlungsbogen Barnes-Rogers hier einen logischen Schlusspunkt.

Als Teil des *Marvel Cinematic Universe* ist Captain America jedoch nicht auf seine eigene Filmserie beschränkt, sondern erscheint außerdem in Marvel's The Avengers (2012), Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015) und Avengers: Infinity War (2018). Darüber hinaus schildert Civil War den Konflikt von Captain America mit einem weiteren Mitglied der Avengers, nämlich Iron Man, selbst Titelfigur einer eigenen Filmtrilogie.[17] Civil War ist damit die narrative Kulmination nicht nur einer, sondern dreier unterschiedlich betitelter Filmserien.

Was das MCU von linear erzählten Event-Blockbusterserien unterscheidet, ist die serielle Organisationsform der Filme, die als eine »Remedialisierung der im Comic initiierten Worldbuilding-Techniken im Film« (Rauscher 2014, 14) zu verstehen ist, also einer Remedialisierung der multilinearen Serienstrukturen, die bis in die 1970er Jahre von diesen Comics etabliert werden. Wie in den parallel erscheinenden Marvel-Comicserien teilen sich auch die Filme um Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, das Avengers-Ensemble und zahlreiche weitere Marvel-Superheld_innen unter dem proklamierten Motto ›*everything's connected*‹ eine gemeinsame Diegese und bestimmte Plotelemente und ihre (größtenteils über alle Filme hinweg kohärent besetzten) Haupt- und Nebenfiguren können

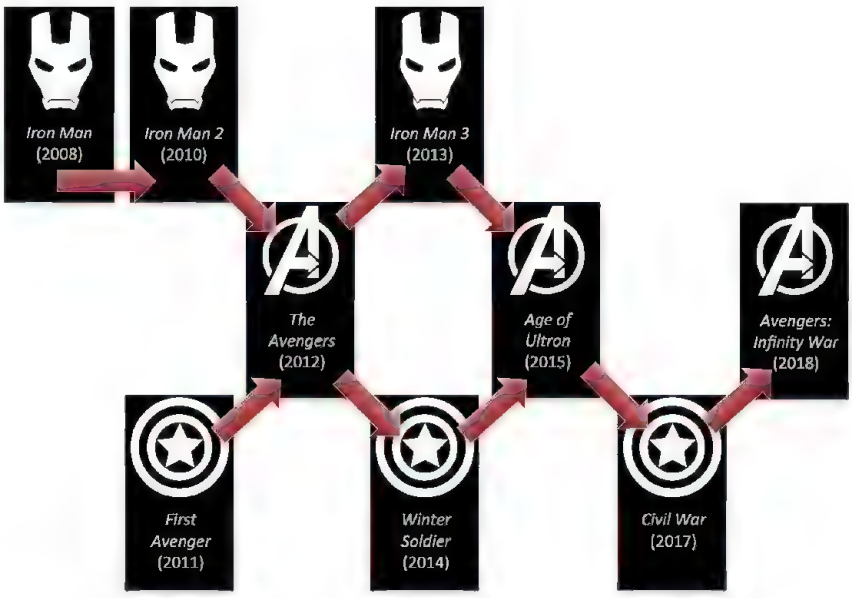

Abb. 3: Interserielle Kohärenz im MCU (Ausschnitt).

von Serie zu Serie wandern. Das narrative Zusammenspiel der Filme lässt sich verstehen, wenn man die einzelnen Serien wie die Iron Man-Trilogie, die Captain America-Trilogie, die Avengers-Filme usw. als *Binnenserien* begreift, die in Summe die *Hyperserie* MCU bilden und an einer das gesamte *shared universe* strukturierenden Narration mitarbeiten (Abb. 3) (vgl. Vignold 2017, 23, 75, 98). In diesem Sinne sind die Binnenserien des MCU nicht mehr nur *intraserial* kohärent, sondern verfügen mitunter auch *interseriell* – von einer Binnenserie zur nächsten – über erhöhte Fortsetzungsdichte und -reichweite, wie eingangs am Beispiel von Civil War kurz demonstriert. So bewirbt jeder weitere Film nicht nur sich selbst und seine eigene Binnenserie, sondern immer auch die gesamte Hyperserie, die gegenwärtig mit drei neuen Kinofilmen pro Jahr weitererzählt wird. Zwar stellt jeder Film einen neuen *point of entry* in das Franchise dar (vgl. Jenkins, o. S.), die Kinobesuche stellen jedoch nur vergleichsweise wenige Glieder einer langen Kette verwandter Konsumaktivitäten (Konsum von TV-/VOD-Serien, Kauf von Comics und Merchandiseartikeln, Besuch von Freizeitparks, Diskussion in Fanforen) dar, in die das Publikum im Rahmen eines »ongoing engagement« (Brinker 2015, 9) eingebunden werden soll. Es wird deutlich, dass die jüngsten Filme um Captain America – beispielhaft für sämtliche Filme des MCU – nicht nur eine ästhetische Verschiebung ausweisen, die Sina mit dem Übergang von der Comicverfilmung zum hypermedialen Comicfilm konkretisiert, sondern sich in einer Verschränkung von Ökonomie und Ästhetik auch die seriellen Zusammenhänge geändert haben, in die die Figur integriert ist. Waren die Live-Action-Filme/Serien des 20. Jahrhunderts – die Comicverfilmungen für Kino und TV – linear strukturierte Episoden bzw. einfache Fortsetzungsgeschichten mit über den jeweiligen Serienverlauf narrativ flach bleibenden Figuren, ist Steve Rogers in den Comicfilmen des MCU ein über mehrere Erzählinstanzen hinweg biografisch ausgestalteter Seriencharakter, der nicht von den diegetischen Grenzen der nach ihm benannten, linearen Filmtrilogie eingeschränkt ist, sondern sich zwischen den multilinear organisierten Binnenserien der Hyperserie hin und her bewegt.

Densons und Mayers' Feststellung berücksichtigend, dass *serielle Figur* und *Seriencharakter* keine exklusiven Zustände sind, lassen sich an der aktuellen Kino-Repräsentation der Figur gleichzeitig typische Charakteristika einer seriellen Figur feststellen, die grundsätzlich bereits durch ihr gleichzeitiges Erscheinen in verschiedenen narrativen Medien (Kinofilm, Animationsfilm, Comic, Videospiel usw.) gegeben ist. Mit der Darstellung durch den Schauspieler Chris Evans in den hypermedialen Comicfilmen des MCU wird die Figur erstmalig über die Darstellung im Medium ihres Ursprungs hinaus ikonisch, in einer Weise, die nicht nur die Figur bis auf weiteres definiert, sondern über ihre Inszenierung auf die ästhetische Überlegenheit eines neuen Mediums bzw. neuen Medienformats – in diesem Fall der CGI-dominierte, in IMAX/Real3D produzierte hypermediale Comicfilm – hinweist (vgl. Densons und Mayers' Beispiele Boris Karloff als Frankensteins Monster, Johnny Weissmüller als Tarzan; 2012, 190). Vergleicht man die Einspielergebnisse der Filmtrilogie (weltweit über $ 2 Mrd. USD) mit den seit den 1990ern nahezu kontinu-

ierlich sinkenden Absatzzahlen der Marvel-Comics (deren bestverkaufte Titel im Monat kaum noch mehr als 25.000 Exemplare absetzen; vgl. McMillan 2017, o.S.), wird der unterschiedliche Bekanntheitsgrad der Comic- bzw. Filmfigur Captain America quantitativ fassbar – auch wenn die Comicfigur über eine Publikationsgeschichte verfügt, die bis in die 1940er Jahre zurückreicht und auf diesem Wege in die Populärkultur eingegangen ist, spielen die Comics in der zeitgenössischen Wahrnehmung der Figur kaum noch eine Rolle. Sie ist vielmehr aufgrund der weltweit erfolgreichen Filmtrilogie in ähnlicher Weise mit dem Schauspieler Chris Evans assoziiert wie Frankensteins Monster mit Boris Karloff, wohingegen die Verfilmungen des 20. Jahrhunderts stets im übermächtigen Schatten der adaptierten Comicvorlage standen.[18]

Damit ist die Figur in grundsätzlich andere serielle Kontexte eingebunden, als sie es in den Verfilmungen des 20. Jahrhunderts war, die ökonomisch begründet sind. Darüber hinaus setzt jeder einzelne Film eine weitere Kette von Zweit- und Drittauswertungen in Gang.[19] Mit der Verschiebung des ökonomischen Modells ändern sich auch die zur Anwendung gebrachten Serialisierungsformen. Wurden Marvel-Filmfranchises bis 2008 aufgrund der rechtlichen Situation isoliert voneinander entwickelt, etablieren Marvel Studios beginnend mit Iron Man das Modell des hyperseriellen ›shared cinematic universe‹, das aufgrund seines kontinuierlichen finanziellen Erfolgs – in zehn Jahren hat Marvel Studios noch keinen kommerziellen Flop produziert – zahlreiche Nachahmungsbemühungen nach sich gezogen hat. Eine davon ist das von Time Warner / DC Films produzierte DC Extended Universe.

Der doppelte Bruce Wayne

Das DCEU kann als Warners Versuch verstanden werden, die hyperserielle Struktur des MCU in einem eigenen Filmfranchise zu reproduzieren, das Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman und eine Reihe weiterer DC-Held_innen in einer ähnlichen Weise zusammenführt, wie es die um die Avengers-Binnenserie zentrierten Marvel-Filme tun. So konstruieren auch der Superman-Reboot Man of Steel (2013), Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016), Suicide Squad (2016), Wonder Woman (2017) und Justice League (2017) eine über alle Filme hinweg kohärente Diegese, in der sich Haupt- und Nebenfiguren von Film zu Film bewegen, vergangene Handlungsstränge wieder aufgegriffen werden sowie gemeinsame Handlungsschauplätze ebenso wie Props als transtextuelle Marker fungieren und ein narratives Bindegewebe zwischen den Filmen ausbilden. Beispielsweise ist Batman, auch wenn er nur in zweien der fünf Filme eine tragende Rolle übernimmt, in allen fünf Filmen anwesend. So taucht in Man of Steel bereits das Wayne Enterprises-Firmenlogo auf einem Satelliten auf und weist so trotz ihrer physischen Abwe-

senheit auf die Existenz der Figur in diesem Universum hin – auch wenn zu diesem Zeitpunkt keine Pläne für ein Crossover bekannt sind. Batman v Superman führt Wayne als Figur ein und integriert ihn nachträglich in die Narration von Man of Steel, indem der Film den finalen Akt des Superman-Reboots – Supermans Kampf gegen den Kryptonier Zod, bei dem große Teile von Metropolis zerstört werden – erneut zeigt, diesmal jedoch aus der Perspektive der Zivilbevölkerung am Boden. Darunter befindet sich auch Bruce Wayne, der die Zerstörung eines seiner Firmengebäude und den Tod zahlreicher Nahestehender und Angestellter bezeugen muss. Auf diese Weise schreibt Batman v Superman die Figur retroaktiv in Man of Steel ein und generiert gleichzeitig die Motivation für den Konflikt der Titelfiguren, die einander in der Tradition der Comics sonst üblicherweise eher wohlgesonnen sind. Der Tod von Superman, dessen am Ende von Batman v Superman gezeigtes Staatsbegräbnis (Abb. 4) zu Beginn von Suicide Squad in derselben Einstellung zitiert wird (Abb. 4), bildet wiederum die narrative Prämisse aus, aufgrund

Abb. 4: Supermans Begräbnis in Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice und Suicide Squad.

der das titelgebende Ensemble von ›Meta-Wesen‹ rekrutiert wird. Hier erscheint Batman in Flashback-Sequenzen sowie als Bruce Wayne in einer Mid-Credits-Szene, in der er eine Geheimakte erhält, die ihm bei der Zusammenstellung eines Teams von ›Meta-Wesen‹ – DCs Bezeichnung für Superheld_innen, gemeint ist hier die Justice League in spe – helfen soll. Beide Szenen sind für die in Suicide Squad abgewickelte Narration nahezu unerheblich und dienen vorrangig dem Anschluss des Films an die von Man of Steel und Batman v Superman entwickelte Diegese. Wonder Woman fällt als größtenteils während des Ersten Weltkriegs spielendes *period piece* aus der fortlaufenden Kontinuität heraus, der Film umgeht dieses Problem jedoch, indem er die größtenteils auf die Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs verlegte *origin story* der Figur als Binnenerzählung in Form einer Erinnerung

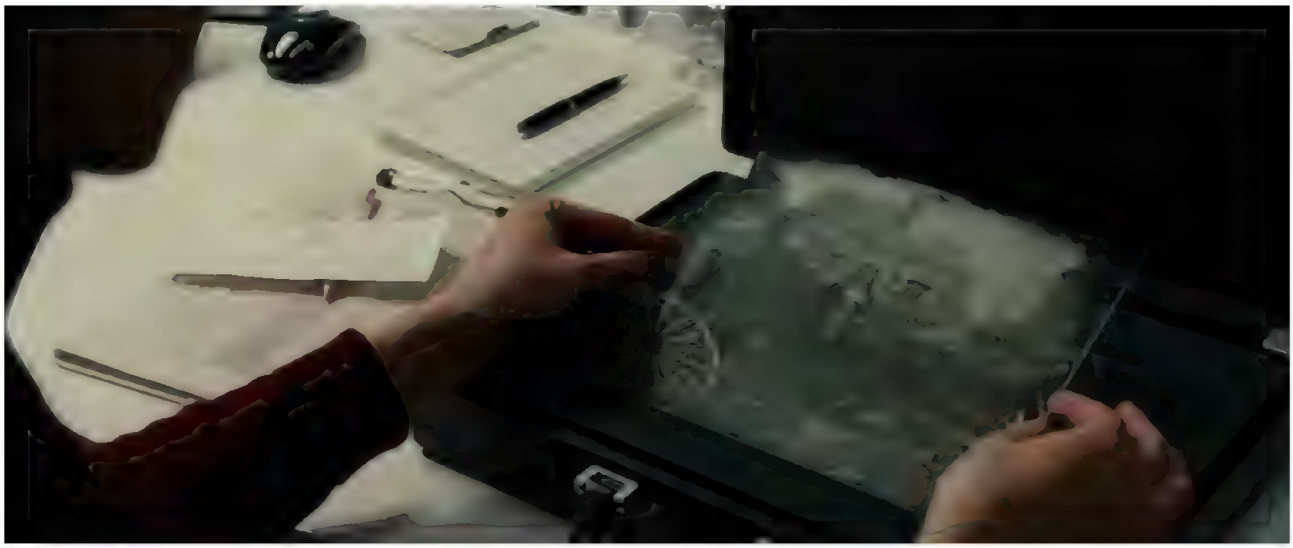

Abb. 5: Wonder Woman.

rahmt. Auslöser dieser Erinnerung ist eine Fotoplatte, die Diana Prince alias Wonder Woman zu Beginn ihres Films via Kurier von Bruce Wayne zugestellt bekommt (Abb. 5), nachdem dieser zuvor in Batman v Superman eine Digitalkopie des 1918 in Belgien aufgenommenen Bildes entdeckt hat (Abb. 6). So ist Wayne/Batman in Wonder Woman nicht physisch präsent, durch das Auslösen der Erinnerung ist er dennoch anwesend und motiviert in gewisser Weise die Narration des Films. In Justice League übernimmt die Figur schließlich wieder zentrale Handlungsfunktionen.
Obwohl in den fünf Filmen die multilineare Verschränkung einer Trilogie – die von Zack Snyder produzierten und inszenierten Man of Steel, Batman v Superman und Justice League – und zweier Spin-Offs – Suicide Squad und Wonder Woman – erkennbar wird,

Abb. 6: Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice.

deren narrative Stränge sich in ähnlich komplexer Weise zu verzweigen beginnen, wie dies bei den Filmen des MCU zu beobachten ist, lässt sich das DCEU mit rahmenden Prolog-/Epilog-Szenen und der visuellen Zitation von Ereignissen vergangener Filme zu diesem Zeitpunkt dennoch als lineare Serie begreifen. Diese wird – unabhängig von den für Unkundige keinerlei inhaltlichen Zusammenhang suggerierenden Titeln der Filme – von einem »gemeinsamen Thema« (Weber/Junklewitz 2008, 18) ebenso wie von ihrem gemeinsamen Setting zusammengehalten. Das über alle Filme hinweg entwickelte Narrativ – nachdem Superman auf der Erde erscheint und stirbt, rekrutiert Batman den Promotionslogan des Films »You Can't Save The World Alone« (Abb. 7) umsetzend ein Team von ›Meta-Wesen‹, um gegen eine zukünftige Bedrohung der Erde gewappnet zu sein, die schließlich eintritt – wird hier kumulativ weitererzählt. Erst wenn das DCEU mit einer internen Serialisierung voranschreitet, wie sie in den Binnenserien des MCU anzutreffen ist – sich also auch hier eine *Serie von Serien* manifestiert, die einen eindimensionalen, linearen Serienbegriff unscharf werden lässt (vgl. Vignold 2017, 10) – erscheint auch die Notwendigkeit für einen relationalen Serienbegriff, um die narrative Organisation der Kinofilme des DCEU akkurat beschreiben zu können.[20]

Abb. 7: Promotion-Poster Justice League.

Dennoch ist die Figur Batman über die angenommene Linearität der DCEU-Kinoserie hinaus in multilineare Serialitätszusammenhänge eingebunden, nämlich entlang der Achse einer Multiplizierung der Figur. Seit 2014 – also zwei Jahre vor dem Kino-Reboot von Batman in Batman v Superman – produziert Warner für den US-Sender Fox die Serie Gotham, die nach dem Vorbild der zehn Jahre lang erfolgreich gelaufenen Superman-Prequel-Serie Smallville (2001-2011) Bruce Waynes Jugend narrativiert. Handlungstragender Protagonist ist jedoch nicht Wayne, sondern der mit dem Mord an dessen Eltern betraute Polizist Jim Gordon, dessen weitere Karriere als Commissioner des Gotham City Police Departments vom Comic-Kanon vorgegeben ist und *en detail* neu interpretiert wird.

Gotham hat über seine bisherige Laufzeit ein umfangreiches Arsenal an wiederkehrenden Nebenfiguren entworfen und weist durch seinen kontinuierlich über alle Folgen weiterentwickelten Handlungsstrang – Bruce Wayne wird zu Batman – einen Grad an Fortsetzungsdichte und -reichweite auf, der aufgrund seiner langen Laufzeit und der großen Menge abgewickelter Plotlines den der Nolan-Trilogie und der DCEU-Filme weit übersteigt. Trotzdem das gleichzeitige Erscheinen von Bruce Wayne/Batman in Film und Fernsehen (sowie Comics, Videospielen, Animationsfilmen und -serien usw.) auf seinen ungebrochenen Status als serielle Figur hinweist, wird in ihren jeweiligen Serien die Ausgestaltung der Figur als biografisch vertiefter Seriencharakter evident.[21]

»You Can't Save The World Alone«

Über die ästhetischen Verschiebungen hinaus, die den Übergang von der Comicverfilmung zum hypermedialen Comicfilm konstituieren, weisen sich zeitgenössische Superheld_innen-Comicfilme durch die Ausbildung multilinearer Serienstrukturen aus, die in ihrer Fortsetzungsdichte und -reichweite den Grad der intraserialen Kohärenz der Film- und TV-Serien des 20. Jahrhunderts deutlich übersteigen. In der Phase des ›post-X-Men booms‹ zu Beginn der 2000er Jahre, den formativen Jahren der hypermedialen Form des Comicfilms, erscheinen vermehrt Comicfilm-Trilogien, die auf dem Weg wachsender Figurenensembles und komplexerer Narrationen die Fortsetzungsdichte und -reichweite im Vergleich zu den Episodenserien erhöhen, ebenso wie sie eine narrative Ausgestaltung ihrer Figuren zu komplexen Seriencharakteren anstreben. So sind Batman und Captain America nicht mehr (nur) die Titelhelden ihrer eigenen Serien, sondern in komplexe Strukturen eingebunden, die die Grenzen einer einzelnen linearen Serie übersteigen.

Die recht unmittelbar mit der Emergenz der hypermedialen Form des Comicfilms einsetzende Tendenz komplexerer Serialisierungsformen vollzieht mit langer Verzögerung eine Entwicklung nach, die in Comicserien der 1970er Jahre bereits vollständig ausgebildet ist. Serialisierungsformen diversifizieren (MCU/DCEU) bzw. multiplizieren sich (DCEU/Gotham), Seriencharaktere werden nicht mehr nur horizontal (in einer linearen Serie), sondern vertikal (in mehreren, multilinear organisierten) (Film-)Serien entwickelt. Der Übergang von den vergleichsweise simpel strukturierten Realfilm-Seriennarrationen des 20. Jahrhunderts zu denen der Gegenwart lässt sich auf die Zeit zwischen 2000 und 2012 lokalisieren – der Zeit zwischen dem Erscheinen von X-Men und Marvel's The Avengers, eben dem sogenannten ›Goldenen Zeitalter der Comicfilme‹. In dieser Zeit setzt über den Weg der Trilogieform eine allmähliche Komplexitätssteigerung ein, das *Marvel Cinematic Universe* ›entgrenzt‹ schließlich die zuvor separat verwalteten Franchises und ordnet sie einer Gesamtdiegese unter. In diesem Sinne ist das ›Goldene Zeitalter der Comicfilme‹ weniger als eine Ära oder Epoche denn als eine lange Umbruchsphase zu verstehen.

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Captain America (USA 1990; R: Albert Pyun)

Captain America: The First Avenger (USA 2011; R: Joe Johnston),

Captain America: The Winter Soldier [The Return of the First Avenger] (USA 2014; R: Joe & Anthony Russo)

Captain America: Civil War [The First Avenger: Civil War] (USA 2016; R: Joe & Anthony Russo)

Captain America II: Death too Soon (USA 1979; R: Ivan Nagy) [Tv]

Catwoman (USA 2004; R: Pitof)

The Dark Knight (USA/UK 2008; R: Christopher Nolan)

The Dark Knight Rises (USA/UK 2012; R: Christopher Nolan)

Dr. Strange (USA 1978; R: Philip Deguere) [Tv]

Elektra (USA 2005; R: Rob Bowman)

Iron Man (USA 2008; R: Jon Favreau)

Iron Man 2 (USA 2010; R: Jon Favreau)

Iron Man 3 (USA 2013; R: Shane Black)

Justice League (USA/UK/CA 2017; R: Zack Snyder [Joss Whedon])

The Lego Batman Movie (USA/DK 2017; R: Chris Mckay)

The Lego Movie (USA/DK/AU 2014; R: Phil Lord, Christopher Miller)

Man Of Steel (USA/UK 2013; R: Zack Snyder)

Man-Thing (USA/D/AU 2005; R: Brett Leonard)

The New Adventures Of Batman And Robin / Batman And Robin (USA 1949; R: Spencer Bennet)

Spider-Man (USA 2002; R: Sam Raimi)

Suicide Squad (USA 2016; R: David Ayer)

Wonder Woman (CN/HK/USA 2017; R: Patty Jenkins)

X-Men (USA 2000; R: Bryan Singer)

Tv-Serien

The Amazing Spider-Man [Spider-Man - Der Spinnenmensch] (USA 1977-1979; Alvin Boretz)

Arrow (USA 2012-; Greg Berlanti, Marc Guggenheim, Andrew Kreisberg)

Batman (USA 1966-1968; Lorenzo Semple Jr. u. William Dozier)

The Flash (USA 2014-; Greg Berlanti, Geoff Johns, Andrew Kreisberg)

Gotham (USA 2014-; Bruno Heller)

The Incredible Hulk [Der unglaubliche Hulk] (USA 1978-1982; Kenneth Johnson)

Legends Of Tomorrow (USA 2016-; Greg Berlanti, Marc Guggenheim, Phil Klemmer, Andrew Kreisberg)

Smallville (USA 2001-2011; Alfred Gough u. Miles Millar)

Supergirl (USA 2015-; Ali Adler, Greg Berlanti, Andrew Kreisberg)

Abbildungsverzeichnis

Abb. 1: Backdraft. Publicity photo (c) Universal Studios Hollywood. In: theStudioTour.com. <http://www.thestudiotour.com/wp/studios/universal-studios-hollywood/theme-park/past-attractions/backdraft/>. Letzter Zugriff am 08.12.2018.

Abb. 2: Eigener Screenshot aus Batman Returns [Batmans Rückkehr] (USA/UK 1992; R: Tim Burton).

Abb. 3: Interserielle Kohärenz im MCU (Ausschnitt).

Abb. 4: Eigener Screenshot aus Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (USA 2016; R: Zack Snyder).

Abb. 5: Eigener Screenshot aus Wonder Woman (CN/HK/USA 2017; R: Patty Jenkins).

Abb. 6: Eigener Screenshot aus Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (USA 2016; R: Zack Snyder).

Abb. 7: *Justice League* (film). In: Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice_League_(film)>. Letzter Zugriff am 08.11.2018.

1] Für eine Einführung in die reziproke Entwicklungsgeschichte von Comic und Film, vgl. Sina (2014).

2] Weber und Junklewitz weisen in ihrer Studie zur *Cineserie* darauf hin, dass Filme aus dem Fantasy/Abenteuer/Science-Fiction-Genre, wozu sie auch um Superheld_innen zentrierte Comicfilme wie Spider-Man (2002) rechnen, regelmäßig in Blockbusterserien integriert sind, wohingegen Einzelwerke eine größere Vielfalt an Genres aufweisen (vgl. Junklewitz/Weber 2010, 349). Damit soll keinesfalls behauptet sein, dass Comicfilme grundsätzlich zur Serialisierung neigen, dennoch wird eine solche Tendenz bei Comicfilmen auf der Basis populärer Figuren von DC Comics oder Marvel – wie eben Spider-Man – evident.

3] An dieser Stelle ist anzumerken, dass die Bezeichnung Marvel Cinematic Universe die offizielle Produktbezeichnung seitens des Studios ist, wohingegen der Begriff DC Extended Universe aus dem Fandiskurs stammt und von der Presse aufgegriffen wurde.

4] Junklewitz' und Webers Resümee lautet, »dass die Cineserien neueren Datums für ihre audiovisuellen Attraktionen geschätzt werden, weniger für ihre kunstvolle serielle Erzählweise« (Junklewitz/Weber 2010, 355). Obwohl die steigenden Budgets für Blockbusterproduktionen diese Annahme nach wie vor unterstützen, muss in Anbetracht filmischer Langerzählungen wie der Harry Potter-Serie, dem über unterschiedliche Zeitstränge laufenden X-Men-Franchise oder dem seit zehn Jahren wachsenden Marvel Cinematic Universe gefragt werden, inwieweit deren finanzieller Erfolg nicht auch auf eine neue Affinität für »kunstvolle serielle Erzählweise« im Blockbusterkino hinweist.

5] Als *franchise reboot* bezeichnen Junklewitz und Weber (2010, 347) den »Neustart einer Serie« durch »Umbesetzung der Hauptfiguren und/oder Änderung der narrativen Prämissen«. Als Beispiel nennen sie u. a. den im Folgenden diskutierten Batman Begins (2005).

6] Entscheidend daran ist für Kelleter und Stein, dass der Wandel der Serialisierungsformen mit einem korrelierenden Wandel der Autorisierungspraktiken verschränkt ist. Diese Kor-

relation reproduziert sich, wenn man ihr Modell vom Comic auf den Comicfilm skaliert, so weist z. B. Brinker (2015) ausführlich auf die wechselseitigen Beziehungen von Medienfranchises und *audience engagement* hin. Aufgrund der Breite der hier geführten Diskussion kann dieser Aspekt jedoch nicht weiter vertieft werden.

7] Für eine ausführliche Erläuterung des Modells vgl. Weber und Junklewitz (2008).

8] Denson und Mayer (2012, 189) weisen jedoch darauf hin, dass sich ihre Unterscheidung auf dominante Modi des seriellen Erzählens bis zu Beginn der 1980er Jahre bezieht. Die später diskutierte BATMAN-Trilogie von Nolan ist für sie ein serielles Format, dass »subtile Schattierungen in der Charakterzeichnung auch für serielle Figuren« einführt und somit als exemplarisch für die hier nachgezeichnete Bewegung verstanden werden kann.

9] In ihren erstmalig 1964 im *Partisan Magazine* erschienenen *Notes on »Camp«* umreißt Susan Sontag ›Camp‹ in 58 Thesen als eine kulturelle Sensibilität im Spannungsfeld von Ästhetik und Rezeptionsstrategie, die der Prämisse »it's good *because* it's awful« folgt. Eine Liebe für das Unnatürliche, ausgestellte Künstlichkeit und Übertreibung bilden die Essenz von ›Camp‹; ›Camp‹ sei jedoch nicht zu verwechseln mit Parodie (vgl. Sontag 1978).

10] In diesem Zusammenhang bemerkenswert ist, dass beide laufenden Serien – *Batman* und *Detective Comics* – im Verlauf der ersten Hälfte der 1960er Jahre von der Absetzung bedroht waren und einer inhaltlichen Kurskorrektur zurück zu einer ernsthafteren Tonalität unterzogen wurden: »In other words, exactly at the same time a campy Batman appeared on TV, his comics were getting more serious« (Sanderson, 29).

11] Analog dazu wurden beide Serials im Jahr 2014 unter dem Titel *Gotham City Serials* auf einer Doppel-DVD des US-amerikanischen Labels Mill Creek Entertainment veröffentlicht.

12] Für eine Übersicht über unterschiedliche Ansätze serieller Narratologie, vgl. Kelleter 26-28; Speziell zur kumulativen Narration in Serien, vgl. Ganz-Blättler (2011, 2012).

13] Ironischerweise ignoriert eine derartige Sichtweise, dass bereits die Burton-Filme von massiven Merchandisepaletten begleitet wurden. Dennoch ist überliefert, dass Warner nach dem als zu düster und gewalttätig empfundenen BATMAN RETURNS einen ›familienfreundlicheren‹ Kurs mit dem Franchise einschlagen wollte.

14] Nichtsdestoweniger weicht auch Pyuns Verfilmung in einigen Punkten von den Vorgaben der Comics ab, die Carter nahezu sämtlich produktionsökonomisch zu begründen weiß (vgl. Carter 2016, 136).

15] Brooker weist wiederholt darauf hin, dass der ›campy-vs.-dark‹-Diskurs über Batman schon in den 1960ern homophob strukturiert ist, die Homophobie mit dem Erscheinen der Schumacher-Filme jedoch deutlich zunimmt (vgl. Brooker 2001, 301).

16] Als *arc* bezeichnet Ganz-Blättler (2011, 75) einen Handlungsbogen, der »auf zukünftige Ereignisse in der Serienhandlung verweist«; *Kumulatives Erzählen* dieser Art untersucht sie als narrative Strategie der Zuschauerbindung via Wissensakkumulation.

17] IRON MAN (USA 2008, Jon Favreau), IRON MAN 2 (USA 2010, Jon Favreau), IRON MAN 3 (USA 2013, Shane Black).

18] Zum »Actor-Character Bonding« vgl. darüber hinaus Pomerance (2016).

19] Mit der Übernahme Marvels durch den Spielzeughersteller Toy Biz Ende der 1990er Jahre

werden die Produktion und Lizensierung von Spielzeugen und Merchandise zum Kerngeschäft des Comicverlags. So fiel auch die Entscheidung, Iron Man als erste Marvel Studios-Produktion zu lancieren aufgrund von Umfragen unter Gruppen von Kindern, denen Spielzeug-Prototypen der für einen Film in Frage kommenden Figuren vorgestellt wurden (vgl. Fritz 2018, 63). Auch die Übernahme Marvels durch den Disney-Konzern im Jahr 2009, so wurde in der Branchenpresse zahlreich kommentiert, zeuge weniger von Disneys Interesse daran, Filme zu produzieren, als mithilfe dieser Filme Spielzeug zu verkaufen. (vgl. Finke 2009, Roberts 2009). Die Ubiquität, mit der Marvel-branded Merchandise in nahezu jedem Kontext erscheint – in Modeketten und Schnellrestaurants, als Spielzeuge, Kleidung, Schreibwaren und Haushaltsgegenstände, um nur ein paar zu nennen – spricht unzweifelhaft dafür.

20] Die Notwendigkeit zeigt sich dringlicher bei der Betrachtung der derzeit vier für den US-amerikanischen Sender *The CW* produzierten TV-Serien auf Grundlage von DC Comicserien, nämlich Arrow (2012–), The Flash (2014–), Legends of Tomorrow (2016–) und Supergirl (2015–). Die vier Serien wurden im Herbst 2017 im Rahmen des Event-Crossovers *Crisis on Earth-X* zusammengeführt, an dem jede Show mit jeweils einer Folge beteiligt war, die im Lauf einer Woche auf vier nacheinander folgenden Sendeplätzen an zwei Tagen ausgestrahlt wurden. Viel deutlicher als die DCEU-Kinofilme bilden die vier Serien des sogenannten ›Arrowverse‹ multilineare Serialitätsstrukturen aus und organisieren sich in Hyperserie (*Arrowverse*) und Binnenserien (Arrow/Flash/Legends/Supergirl).

21] Obwohl keine Live-Action-Inszenierung sondern ein CGI-Animationsfilm, bringen The LEGO Movie und The LEGO Batman Movie einen weiteren ›Dunklen Ritter‹ auf die Leinwand. Beide Filme operieren unabhängig vom *DC Universe* und integrieren dieses gleichzeitig in die Diegese des eigenen Franchise. Obwohl insbesondere The LEGO Batman Movie eine Vielzahl von Bildschirm- und Leinwandadaptionen Batmans bis hin zur Nolan-Trilogie referenziert, überwiegen die parodistischen Elemente, die den von US-Komiker Will Arnett synchronisierten LEGO Batman als Gegenpol zu den ernsthaften Charakterisierungen durch Ben Affleck (DCEU) bzw. David Mazouz (Gotham) positionieren und damit die alte ›*campy-vs-dark*‹-Dichotomie reaktivieren. Die parallele Koexistenz der drei ästhetisch/narrativ/strukturell unterschiedlichen Batman-Serien und die Diversität der Repräsentationen ihrer Titelfigur weisen darauf hin, wie sich nach Abschluss der Dark Knight-Trilogie um die Batman-Figur in Film und TV multilineare Serialitätsstrukturen ausbilden, nicht im Sinne einer auf Crossover hinarbeitenden Verzweigung der jeweiligen Serien, sondern im Sinne einer vertikalen Schichtung voneinander unabhängiger Serienerzählungen, innerhalb derer sie zum Seriencharakter ausgebaut werden kann (DCEU, Gotham), aber nicht muss (LEGO-Filme). Von der Seite des Comics aus betrachtet, so wie Kelleter und Stein es tun, ist das LEGO Batman-Spin Off sicherlich ein Indiz für konnexionistische Serialität, die dritte Stufe ihres Evolutionsmodells. Es bliebe zu diskutieren, ob und wie dies auch vom Film ausgehend behauptet werden kann, wie es hier getan wird. Es sei jedoch anzumerken, dass die LEGO-Filme in ihrer Funktion als »Tie-In Movies« vorwiegend einer Stärkung der Marke LEGO zuarbeiten (vgl. Simon 2017).

CLOSURE
Kieler e-Journal für Comicforschung

The ›Affected Scholar‹

Reading Raina Telgemeier's *Ghosts* as a Disability Scholar and Cystic Fibrosis Patient

Dorothee Schneider (Kiel)

As an academic, I have often wondered how to bridge the divide between my emotions and personal experiences and the »dominant discourse of affectless rationality« that prevails in academic settings (Clegg, 71). The dominance of the supposed »›scientific superiority of detached reason‹ and ›objective observation‹ over the ›emotional‹ and the ›subjective‹« (Greco & Stenner, 6) has never become clearer to me than when I confront works of fiction that feature characters whose stories resemble my own disability experience. Having been trained with that »particular view of rationality [that] remains discursively central to the idea of university« (Clegg, 71) in mind, I wonder how we as scholars with disabilities are supposed to deal with such works of fiction that affect us personally. Are we perhaps unable to write ›academically‹ about characters which go through experiences that might resemble our own disability experience too closely? Or should we openly confront the emotions these representations might trigger, in the same way that we clarify our theoretical assumptions? Is there a chance that we might even arrive at a deeper insight if we allow the personal to influence our research?

Feminist and postcolonial scholars have exposed the »objective« as the »unmarked positions of Man and White« (Haraway, 581) and, one should add, Heterosexual and Able-bodied. They have also discussed the relationship between emotion, or affect, and (feminist) theory (Pedwell & Whitehead), showing that scholarly interest in empathy and affect has risen in recent years (Donaldson & Prendergast, 131; see also Gibson or Coplan), with Monica Greco and Paul Stenner speaking of an »affective turn« (4). One discipline that has long placed the critical engagement with »affective experiences« at its center is disability studies (Goodley & Lilliard & Runswick-Cole, 206). Scholars like David Bolt have emphasized how bringing »experiential knowledge of disability« to analyses of »primary works« can facilitate a »deconstructive process […] that often involves a subversion of ableist […] binaries« (131). Following David Bolt's example, I will therefore use a (literary) disability studies approach for my analysis of Raina Telgemeier's graphic novel *Ghosts* (2016) – an approach

that enables me to integrate my personal experience of chronic illness and disability and my emotional involvement into my analysis. Thus, speaking from the position of an ›affected scholar‹, I will analyze the depiction of cystic fibrosis in the graphic novel. My choice of *Ghosts* is grounded in my interest in the way in which a – mostly – invisible illness like cystic fibrosis is represented in the visual medium of the comic.

Confronting Emotions in (Literary) Disability Studies

Disability scholars have argued over the role that emotions should be allowed to play in the discipline. Elizabeth J. Donaldson and Catherine Prendergast point out a central problem in this discussion with the subtitle »There's No Crying in Disability Studies!« to their 2016 introduction to a special issue on Disability and Emotion of the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*. Donaldson and Prendergast explain that while disability studies' efforts to move away from a depiction of disability entwined with tragedy and pity continue to carry a politically vital message (133), scholarship should »query what forms of emotion are allowed in our ›intellectual‹ work« (130). Their article underlines the importance of confronting our hidden emotional investments:

> Renewed attention to the emotions is vital in Disability Studies for several reasons: to reveal the contours and limits of public discourse and the democracy it sustains; to recognize literary expression and persuasive tropes; to examine the hidden interests of architects of medical models; to represent the genesis and scope of Disability Studies itself (ibid. 134).

The aversion to (negative) emotions in the field is deeply connected to the roots of disability studies in the disability rights movement (Báar, 281f) that continues to fight against common ableist representations of disability as tragic or pitiable (Nielsen, 8). Ableism is a discourse that sets being able-bodied as the full state of being human and thereby casts people with disabilities as being less-than-human (Campbell, 5). Literary disability scholarship has actively sought to counteract these representations in the social realist tradition:

> If the negative image results from associations of disability with personal failure, tragic loss, and excessive dependency, then social realists search for more accurate images that could effectively counterbalance this detrimental history (Mitchell & Snyder, 22).

The emphasis on the social model of disability that focuses on disabling social barriers and attitudes has moved the focus away from »details of impairment, such as the presence and persistence of pain« and »downplay[ed] the *effects* or *manifestations* of impairment« for people with disabilities (Kafer, 5), thereby also excluding their emotional responses to these effects. As Alison Kafer puts it aptly:

> [M]y experiences as someone with a disabled body surely inform my work in disability studies. But how has my theorizing also been informed by the things I'm not supposed to talk about, by the feelings and reactions – by the mental and emotional distress – that do not yet fit within disability studies? (5)

And she adds: »A crip[1] refusal to see disability as tragedy, as traumatic, can just be as restricting on our politics and our theories as the ableist insistence that disability is always and only tragic« (Kafer, 6).

Like Kafer, who discloses her disability in her article and discusses its implications for her research, Donaldson and Prendergast also point out that they, like other disability studies scholars, often draw their inspiration from the personal realm, which bears the risk – or the opportunity – of bringing emotions tied to one's personal disability experience into one's research (129). Many scholars have been drawn to disability studies based on personal experience of disability or illness, which is certainly linked to the activist roots of the field. As Dan Goodley writes: »[O]ne should come to disability studies with a profound desire to understand and *change* the conditions of contemporary society. If not, why bother?« (34; my emphasis). Arguably, scholars are more likely to »bother« if they have personally experienced the limiting and denigrating effects of ableism. And, as mentioned above, bringing »experiential knowledge of disability« to the table can enrich our analyses and help dismantle ableist dichotomies (Bolt, 131).

However, one might still choose not to disclose one's disability[2], and indeed, academia might not be the ideal place for »coming out as disabled« (Samuels 2017a, 346) since »[t]he ideal of autonomous academic selfhood and the reality of the monadic workplace exclude the body« (MacArthur, 177). While Janet MacArthur feels that »not-quite not-other academics have a responsibility to speak out about these barriers in the workplace« (178) many fear rejection and keep silent in the face of possible repercussions. Revelations of one's disability, at least outside of disability studies, are often viewed as »narcissistic taboo excretions«, since disabilities are still mostly not visible in academia – in contrast to issues of gender and race that have been brought to attention in recent years (ibid. 178).

›Affected scholars‹ are, thus, confronted with a problem: bringing our personal background (read: our disability and/or chronic illness) into our research, especially when confronting the emotional side this background may include, may carry the risk of our research being unwillingly perceived as less valuable. The inclusion of emotions, such as passion or its absence into one's scholarship is generally viewed as carrying the risk of personalizing academic work and thus making it appear not only less than serious but »even as biased and unscientific —and thus as irrelevant, unimportant, or frivolous« (Neumann, 381). However, like Donaldson and Prendergast, Anna Neumann points to the concerns that this dismissal of emotions may cause, namely that such »deflection may weaken professors' scholarly endeavors and identities, especially if emotion and personal meaning help to constitute scholarly thought« (382).

As disabled scholars, with our identities and research interests intertwining, I believe we need to be able to express and explore our emotional involvement with our research topic. Similar to confronting our implicit theoretical assumptions, examining our emotional ties to a topic will lead to better, more reflective research. Opening up about having a disability and/or chronic illness in the field of academia can help make (further) visible the existence of disability in academia and add to a larger plurality of possible academic identities. Keeping in mind that traditionally, universities were »set up to exclude disabled people« (Mitchell & Snyder 2006, 198) and served as locations where »disabled people have been objects of study but not purveyors of the knowledge base of disability« (ibid), our openness will hopefully lead to more reflection on mechanisms of exclusion still at work in academic settings.

With these thoughts on identity, disability scholarship and emotions in mind, I will analyze the graphic novel *Ghosts* by Raina Telgemeier. *Ghosts*, a graphic novel written for children ages eight and upward (Kois, n. pag.), tells the story of two sisters, Maya and Catrina Allende-Delmar, whose mixed-race (latin/white) family moves to northern California because of Maya's health. Maya has cystic fibrosis and is thought to benefit from the saltier climate. However, the sisters soon discover that Bahía de la Luna, their new home, is a dwelling place of ghosts. Here, Catrina is confronted with the fear of losing her sister to her congenital disease; a fear that becomes entwined with the *día de los muertos* celebrations of the town and her own Mexican heritage.

Reviews of *Ghosts* were favorable, with the *New York Times* calling it a »heartfelt graphic novel, a typically empathetic and complex work« which »sensitively explores many dynamics of Mexican-American family life« (Kois, n. pag.). Critics have underlined the comic's engagement with loss and death (see Kois; Hansen; Frost; Spisak) and often highlight *Ghosts*' depiction of Mexican heritage and the *día de los muertos*, (see Ludtke; Kois), with one critic questioning the »harmful« appropriation of Mexican culture (Arredondo, n. pag.). The *Graphic Medicine*-review by Kevin Wolf briefly describes that cystic fibrosis plays a role in the narrative, and mentions that *Ghosts* uses magical realism to ask the question of »[w]hat might death mean to a child who understands their disease will shorten their life?« (n. pag.). However, more in-depth questions of the depiction of cystic fibrosis, such as the form of its portrayal, or even the question why cystic fibrosis was chosen for the narrative in the first place are not brought to attention by these critics.

Since other scholars, so far, have shied away from this topic, my analysis will focus more specifically on these issues and interrogate the role of cystic fibrosis in the narrative, as well as the specifics of its depiction in a comic. As both a cystic fibrosis patient and scholar in literary disability studies, my personal illness experience will affect my reading of *Ghosts*. I will show, however, that this will not limit or distort my reading of the graphic novel, but that my

»experiential knowledge« (Bolt, 131) of living with cystic fibrosis will instead provide another nuance to *Ghosts*' analysis.

Cystic Fibrosis[3]

To make my analysis of the depiction of cystic fibrosis in *Ghosts* easier to assess, I will briefly describe the underlying cause of the disease and its most common symptoms and therapeutic interventions. According to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, cystic fibrosis, often abbreviated as CF, is »a progressive, genetic disease that causes persistent lung infections and limits the ability to breathe over time« (CFF a). Cystic fibrosis is caused by a gene defect that causes the complete lack or malfunction of a transmembrane protein (the CFTR-protein) that normally transports chloride in and out of cells (Antoniou & Elston, 321). This leads to a build-up of thick mucus in the organs, mainly the lungs, but cystic fibrosis also affects the digestive system and the pancreas, often leading to malnutrition, liver disease and diabetes (Antoniou & Elston, 322). Therapies include airway clearance through nebulized saline, medication that helps liquefying the thick mucus, chest physiotherapy, and antibiotics to fight bacterial infections of the lungs (ibid.). With the progression of loss of lung function, patients may require supplemental oxygen, with a lung transplant as the final option for those in end-stage lung disease (ibid. 323). Patients with pancreatic insufficiency will usually eat a specific high caloric diet and require the intake of enzymes to facilitate the absorption of nutrients (ibid.). In case of severe malnutrition, tube feeding may help to maintain a good nutritional status (ibid.). Life expectancy for CF patients has risen continuously, with the median life expectancy for patients born in 2016 reaching 47 years (meaning that 50% of these children are expected to live to or beyond the age of 47) (CFF b). As Stuart J. Elborn writes: »The remarkable progress that has been achieved by improving airway mucus clearance and controlling lung infection has changed cystic fibrosis from being predominantly a disease of children to now being predominantly an adult disorder« (2521).

Even though cystic fibrosis is the most common autosomal recessive disorder in Caucasians (Antoniou & Elston, 321) with around 30,000 patients in the US alone and ca. 70,000 patients world-wide (CFF a), literary or filmic depictions of cystic fibrosis are rare. The few portrayals of CF in popular culture often seem unrealistic from a patient's perspective, for example by portraying characters in end-stage lung disease able to complete exhausting physical activities without showing signs of shortness of breath or coughing, or by giving inaccurate information about the disease (Dell, n. pag.).

In the next section of this article, I will analyze Raina Telgemeier's *Ghosts* the in more detail. I will begin with a literary disability studies perspective on graphic novel, followed by an examination of the comic that factors in a reflection of my personal experience of living with cystic fibrosis.

»Cough cough, wheeze wheeze«: Reading *Ghosts* from a Literary Disability Studies Perspective

Ghosts is one of very few (fictional) representations of cystic fibrosis in popular culture[4] and among these the only longer graphic novel.[5] Other than the fact that CF is generally not a very well-known disease, this lack of representations of CF might also be due to the difficulty of including a complex genetic disease into the plot without adding pages of medical background information. With regard to the comic medium, an additional difficulty that arises is that cystic fibrosis, on top of being a complex medical condition, can very well be described as an invisible illness. When not currently undergoing an exacerbation (meaning an active infection), cystic fibrosis patients can often appear healthy and pass as ›normal‹, even though some might be smaller and underweight for their age (The Lancet Respiratory Medicine, 823).

Raina Telgemeier solves the problems of invisibility and complexity through different strategies. When Maya is first pictured in the opening pages of the comic, her disease is not rendered visible and readers are only made aware of her CF by the comments of Catrina (called Cat), her older sister. While ascription of narration in comics is a debated issue, I will argue that in *Ghosts*, all of the verbal narration in captions can be attributed to Cat, who accordingly functions as a »narrator-as-narrating-character«, as described by Jan-Noël Thon (70). This becomes especially clear when regarding how Cat provides the necessary background information about cystic fibrosis that is set in captions at several points in the story (e.g. Fig. 1): »Maya has cystic fibrosis. It's a thing you're born with. / It affects breathing and digestion. / And there's no cure« (5). Cat's medical comments on the opening pages are contrasted with the panel content, which shows a happy Maya eating »Frootzies« with gusto and singing along loudly to the radio (3;5).[6] Right at the beginning of the narrative, an important distinction between two perspectives on cystic fibrosis is created. On the one hand stands the bleak medical perspective relayed through the narrator-character Cat (»[…] and there's no cure« (5)). On the other hand, we have Maya's positive spirit, represented through her singing that seems to drown out Cat's negative perspective, at least in the bottom panel of page 5, when the yellow speech bubble over Maya's singing obscures Cat's face and Cat's small caption is

Fig. 1: *Ghosts* (Telgemeier, 50).

confined to the bottom right corner of the panel. These two perspectives associated with the two respective characters are present throughout the entire narrative, with Cat's perspective mostly dominating over Maya's, as I will discuss in more detail below.

Another way of making cystic fibrosis visible in *Ghosts* is the inclusion of sequences of panels to illustrate Maya's treatments, and of drawings of her medical equipment in the back- or foreground of single panels. For example, the bottom panel on page 10 shows Maya's father setting up the living room in the new house and shows the air-pulse generator for her vest in the lower left corner of the panel.[7] The equipment is then shown in use in a sequence that illustrates Maya's breathing treatment on page 14. A short action-to-action sequence in three small panels at the top of the page shows Maya setting up her vest with the help of her father (14) (cf. McCloud). This is followed by two broad panels in a moment-to-moment transition, with the long shape of the two bottom panels and the speech bubble that covers the entire upper length of the lower panel, illustrating the length of the treatment (cf. ibid.). The vibration of the vest is illustrated through multiple images of a singing Maya, the sound effects »shooka shooka shooka« and »VRRRRRRR« (representing the sound of the air-pulse generator) and the shaky lines of the letters in the speech bubble. A similar speech bubble is also visible in the next panel on the following page that contains an explanatory caption by Cat: »The vest helps loosen the mucus in her lungs« (15; Fig. 2). In terms of representational agency, it is important to note that it is Cat, the healthy sister, who provides the anchorage, i.e. the »denoted description of the image[s]« that illustrate Maya's illness (Derik-BadMan, n. pag.). While this helps readers understand what Maya is doing at points in the narrative, it also locates the interpretive power in Cat, not in Maya, the patient living with cystic fibrosis. Another example of such an action-to-action sequence that illustrates the treatment regime of cystic fibrosis is the preparation of the nutrients that Maya takes overnight via gastrostomy tube (called a g-tube) (50).

Fig. 2: *Ghosts* (Telgemeier, 15).

This sequence again focuses on Maya's positive personality and compliance and shows Maya happily shaking up the nutrient mixture (50). Even though Cat introduces the sequence in another caption (»Because cystic fibrosis affects digestion, Maya doesn't always get enough nutrients from food / so she has to get them another way«) she provides no other medical details or anchoring, such as naming the g-tube, even though we see a close-up of the ›button‹ g-tube to which Maya connects the feeding pump. So even though this sequence introduces another component of CF therapy, it functions mainly as an instance of characterization of Maya.

This strategy of placing characterization over medical accuracy also becomes clear with regard to Maya's breathing treatments. As illustrated above, using a nebulizer is one of the essential treatments for airway clearance in CF patients and often goes along with the vest treatment but Maya does not seem to use one. The use of a nebulizer, which creates small cloudy puffs of mist, could very well have been used to visualize the treatment of the disease and the importance of breathing that Telgemeier illustrates through sound effects like »Hfffffff« and »Hwooooooh« (for breathing in and out, 25 and 26 resp.). Instead, Maya is vocalizing a loud »LA-A-A-A-A«, which resembles her singing and, again, highlights her positive spirit that she retains throughout her treatments, which is further underlined by the size and red color of the letters.

Other than direct representations of Maya's treatment, Telgemeier also uses visual metaphors to illustrate the impact of cystic fibrosis on Maya and her family. As Maya's illness progresses, she needs more medical equipment. After she returns home from a hospital stay, she requires supplementary oxygen. When Cat enters her room, the coils of Maya's nasal cannula lie on the floor before her feet, illustrating how Maya's disease threatens to ›entangle‹ Cat, who tries to keep her fears about Maya's illness at bay (114, Fig. 3). Maya's disease, even though it is not constantly emphasized, is a continual undercurrent in the family's

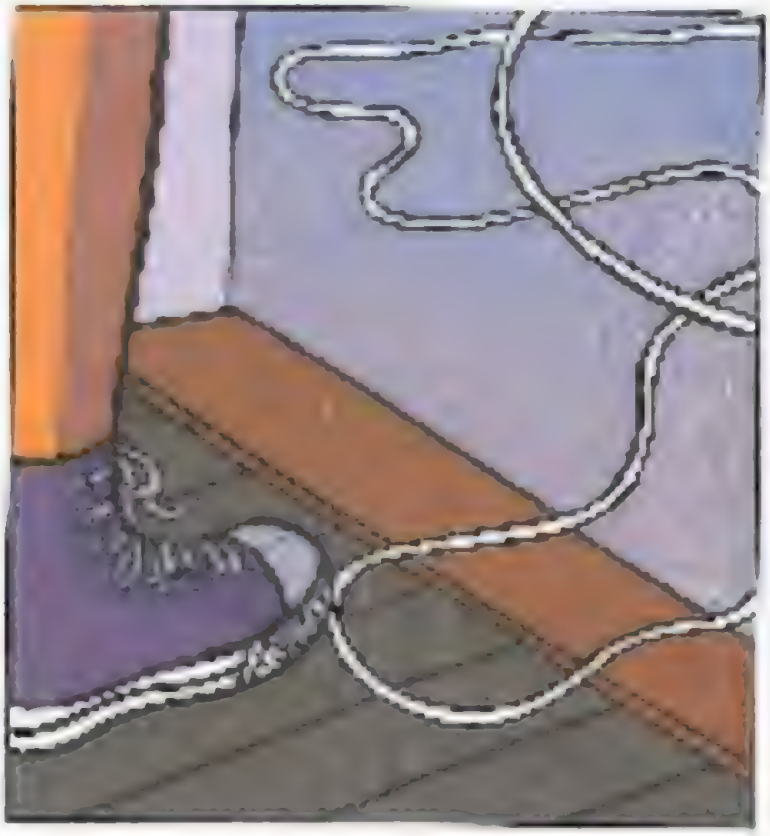

Fig. 3: *Ghosts* (Telgemeier, 114).

daily life. This is also exemplified by Maya's medical equipment that is often part of the panel background and not always shown in use (e.g. 60).

In the previous panels, when Maya is not yet oxygen-dependent and her disease is not visible in public (her treatments take place in the privacy of the family's living room or in her bedroom), sound effects are used to illustrate her CF. Maya's difficulty breathing after running down some stairs to the beach is illustrated with »wheeze wheeze« and a coughing fit is shown with the words »cough« and »hack« in different fonts and sizes (13, Fig. 4). When Maya is out of breath, she doubles over and »pant, pant« is written next to her (145), thus visualizing her breathlessness.

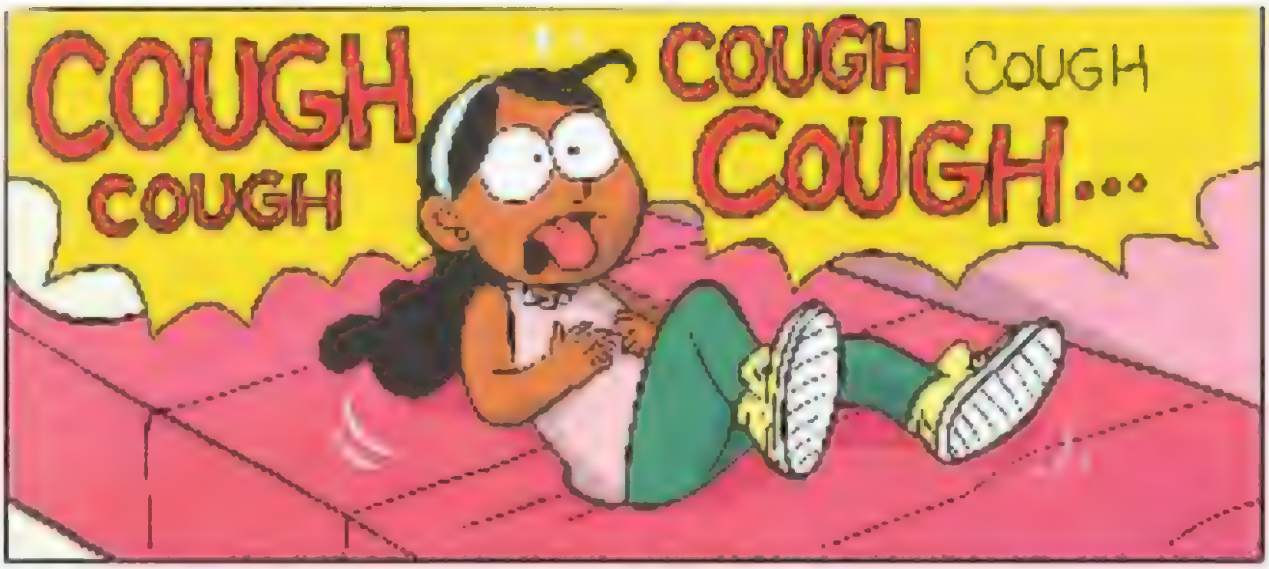

Fig. 4: *Ghosts* (Telgemeier, 13).

Even though Maya's health deteriorates in the course of the narrative, the representation of Maya's character and her general physique do not change in the course of the graphic novel. The comic focuses on Maya's consistency as a character rather than on the physical changes caused by the progression of disease, such as possible weight-loss, paleness, or even a red face caused by a coughing fit. The color palette of the comic, however, does change occasionally (cf. Spisak, 603). A change to darker hues is especially prominent when a very sick Maya comes home from the hospital and Cat worries whether or not she will get better again (114) – and changes to lighter colors once Maya has recuperated (137). Here, »character-bound focalization« (Horstkotte & Pedri 335) can clearly be ascribed to Cat, because the »storyworld« »[is refracted] through the protagonist's mental life« (ibid. 339).

Through comic specific techniques, such as capturing Cat's explanations in captions, the panel sequences showing Maya's treatment and depicting the treatment equipment in the background of panels, the graphic illustration of metaphors and sound effects and changes

in color, the comic visualizes the different invisible symptoms, treatments and the impact of cystic fibrosis on Cat and her family in a way that is accessible for readers who are not familiar with the illness. However, the representation of health and illness in the comic is largely dependent on Cat. Her »mind style«, that is, the systematic choices of representation and the language in which these representations are framed in the comic (Mikkonen, n. pag.), for example through the captions and the color palette, forms the primary lens through which Maya's cystic fibrosis is represented. This shows a discrepancy in narrative agency that gives representational power to the healthy sister and makes Maya mostly an object, rather than a subject, in the narrative. Having examined the representation of health and illness, I will now turn to a closer examination of the plot and narrative of *Ghosts*.

The story of *Ghosts* is set in motion with a change caused by Maya's illness which affects the whole family: The Allende-Delmars move from Southern to Northern California to »this gloomy place« (6) Bahía de la Luna, where the colder, salty climate is thought to be beneficial to Maya's health. Cat's first reaction to the relocation is to exclaim »Ew, I'd rather die!« (6). As the shocked reaction of her parents and sister shows, death and the emotions connected to it are a taboo topic for the family. Apparently, the move to Northern California is not only thought to improve Maya's health but also to prevent her early death, which the family seems to assume to be very likely. This fear is underlined by Cat's clarification: »Of course I don't want Maya to die« (7). The narrative thus connects the move to Maya's disease and her reduced life expectancy. As the story progresses, it turns more directly towards Cat's fear of Maya's death, which is illustrated through the comic's »magical realis[ist]« (Wolf, n. pag.) engagement with the Mexican *día de los muertos* tradition.

Maya and Cat's family, even though their maternal side has Mexican roots, has not celebrated the day of the dead until this point, which is explained by the mother's difficult relationship with her grandmother that lead to her rejection of Mexican traditions (57f). However, this refusal also seems consistent with the family's general lack of engagement with the topic of death. Maya and Cat learn about the *día de los muertos* celebration in their new town from their Latin neighbors, who explain that they throw the ghosts »a big party, with the best music, dancing, and food« (47). This positive attitude towards death contrasts sharply with the silence that surrounds the topic in the Allende-Delmar family. Since Maya's parents do not seem to be able or willing to discuss the topic of death with her, and the option of a lung transplant is not explored, both Maya and Cat are confronted with Maya's impending death, without the possibility of voicing their emotions connected to this.

However, Maya and Cat soon find out that Bahía de la Luna is frequented by actual ghosts that are drawn as »floaty, sea green, protoplasmic beings« (Hansen, n. pag.). The graphic novel's magical realism allows for the insertion of the ghosts into the intradiegetic reality of the novel and thus gives Maya and Cat the possibility to confront the topic of death through their engagement with the ghosts as the manifestations of deceased people. While the medi-

cal side of life with cystic fibrosis is represented more or less accurately in the comic, when dealing with the topic of loss and death, the narrative turns away from a ›realistic‹ to a symbolic representation and magical realism, suggesting that the reality of death needs to be made accessible through symbolic deferral.

The son of their new neighbors, Carlos, explains about the ghosts: »Because of the fog, the ghosts see our town as the perfect place to hang out« (46) and »They can't breathe on their own, so they absorb the essence of the world breathing around them« (96). The ghosts' inability to breathe symbolically connects them to Maya, who also has trouble breathing, which in turn links Maya further to the topic of death. This becomes especially clear in Maya's quest to meet a ghost, because she wants »to know what happens when you die« (72). But while Maya is curious and wants to talk to the ghosts, Cat tries to keep her away from them.

Cat takes the position of caretaker for her sister, and is always trying to keep her safe: »I'm her big sister. I'm supposed to protect her« (107). She offers Maya her sweater (74) and chides her for seemingly reckless behavior (»The dust is bad for your lungs« 32). Since Cat is under the impression that Maya will die soon, but has no possibility of confronting her fears, she angrily rejects everything that is connected to death – especially the ghosts. She seems afraid that if Maya receives any information on what it is like to die (or be dead), she might die sooner. Therefore, she tries to prevent Maya from coming in contact with them, because she seems afraid that they might take Maya with them, especially after the spirits become too excited when playing with her, and she breaks down with a coughing fit that causes her to be hospitalized (102, Fig. 5). Actually, it is uncommon for cystic fibrosis patients to be hospitalized for over-exertion; rather, hospitalization occurs mostly to combat an infection in the lungs that usually takes some time to develop (Tassin, n. pag.). However, in the context

Fig. 5: *Ghosts* (Telgemeier, 102).

of the story this misrepresentation has a function: Maya's sudden decline is caused by her contact with the ghosts that signify her closeness to death and her hospitalization underlines Cat's fear of losing her sister as well as her attempts to protect Maya and herself from confrontation with the topic of death. As becomes clear here, the focus of the narrative lies not so much with cystic fibrosis but rather with the anxiety of loss that is central to Cat. As Carlos explains later: »If you share a tiny bit of your own breath … sometimes they'll speak to you«, to which Cat only retorts, angrily: »Speak to you about what? Coming to join them?!?« (106).

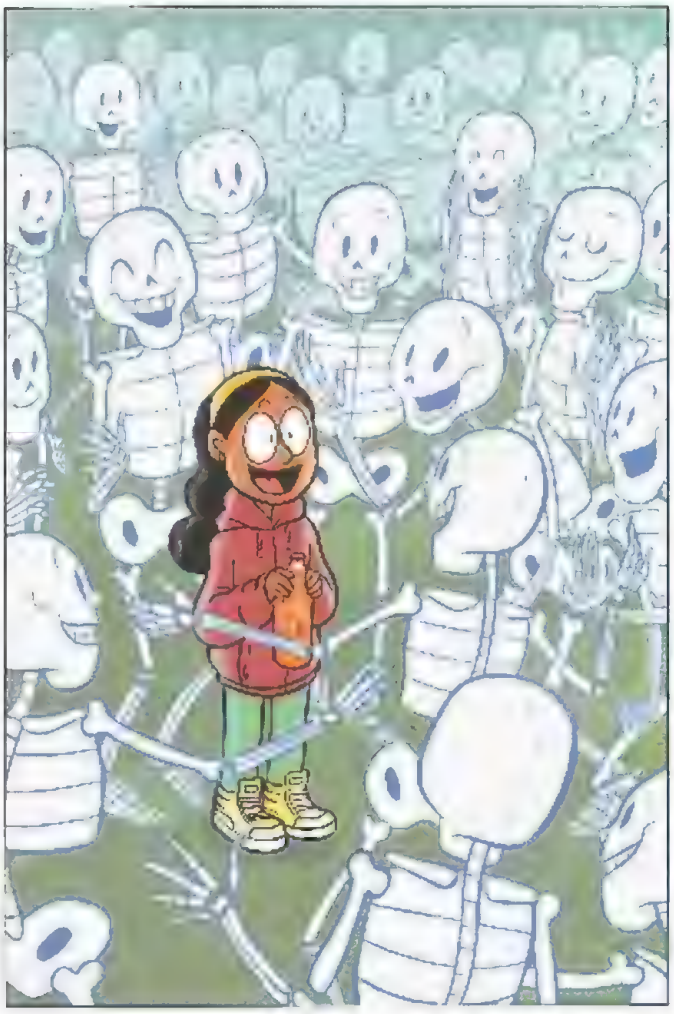

Fig. 6: *Ghosts* (Telgemeier, 94).

The first meeting with the ghosts illustrates the different perspectives that Cat and Maya have on death and cystic fibrosis. Even though the ghosts are drawn as happy, almost human-looking skeletons with individual faces when they interact with Maya (Fig. 6, 94), from Cat's perspective they appear as shapeless, faceless blobs. As April Spisak points out in her review, the characters need to »make a connection with an individual« after which the ghosts take on the skeleton form (603). The subject-to-subject sequence of their first encounter with the ghosts again illustrates the differences in perception between Maya and Cat. Cat's fear keeps her from seeing the ghosts' individual forms; to her they are indistinguishable and appear to be threatening Maya (99), while Maya can interact with the happy ghosts. Maya, in contrast to Cat, seems to regard death and her own shortened life-expectancy with positivity and curiosity and the smiling skeletons she can see mirror this attitude. The ghosts, literal manifestations of death, and still in their form of shapeless blobs, keep following the fearful Cat around and also appear at the family's house. Cat tries to outrun the ghosts and when she later shouts at the ghosts »MAYA'S / NOT / READY!!!« (124), it becomes clear that she cannot face her sister's possible death and is haunted by it (Fig. 7, 124).

Fig. 7: Ghosts (Telgemeier, 124).

This point also illustrates one of the central issues of the comic, namely its narrative situation that I have commented on before: *Ghosts* is almost solely told from the perspective of Cat. While Cat herself is healthy,[8] she knows quite a lot about cystic fibrosis and its treatment and provides necessary background information for the implied reader of the comic, who is not familiar with cystic fibrosis. And while the graphic novel thus gains a didactic function and gives a small insight into the daily life of a cystic fibrosis patient and the struggles that this brings to families, and especially healthy siblings, through Cat's perspective, the story only uses Maya as a focalizer in a few instances. Thus, the narrative misses the opportunity to gain more insight into an otherwise rather flat character, who is very much defined by her disease. And, as discussed above, it ascribes the interpretive agency of what it is like to live with cystic fibrosis to the healthy sister and not to the patient. Thus, the comic mostly silences Maya. As Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole point out, this voicelessness is a common problem: »young people with ›life-limiting‹ or ›life-threatening‹ impairments (LL/LTIs)« (197)

> are living longer than ever before, yet we know little of their lives, particularly from their own perspectives. This lack of knowledge is due to the marked absences of this unique group of disabled young people from public imagination and broader culture. Young people with LL/LTIs have been omitted from much academic research; are seldom explicitly written into public policy; are often excluded from disability communities and disabled people's own movements; and have their voices dominated by professional perspectives within palliative (end-of-life) care teaching, education and training (205).

In *Ghosts*, it is Cat's medically influenced fearful perspective that dominates the Maya's perspective on her illness. At the beginning of the narrative, we as readers do not get to know whether or not Maya's disease frightens her or makes her sad, although we do learn that she is curious to know what happens after death. Maya is generally portrayed as a very happy, playful child who is extremely compliant in terms of her therapy, and never resists

the treatment. In fact, the only negative emotion that the narrative allows Maya to express with regard to her cystic fibrosis is sadness. Anger and fear are almost exclusively reserved for her sister. The only central point in the comic when Maya explicitly expresses negative emotions about her CF is when she is not allowed to go trick-or-treating for Halloween with Cat, after her health has deteriorated: »What was the point in moving here, Mom? / We came to Bahía de la Luna so I could be healthier, right? So I could actually do stuff – […]// It's not like I'm ever going to get better. […] / So why not let me have fun while I can?« (162f). During this exchange, Maya wears her Halloween costume, an angel costume with wings and a halo (Fig. 8) symbolizing both her vulnerability, innocence and her closeness to death. The window behind which Maya is pictured adds an additional frame to the panel that makes Maya appear imprisoned, underlining the hopelessness of her situation and her exclusion from the ›normal‹ outside world. In the cystic fibrosis community, the death of a member is often circumscribed in the words: »S/he gained her wings« which makes Maya's costume an explicit link not only to death but to death by cystic fibrosis. It also underlines her angelic nature and compliance that is stressed throughout the narrative. Maya's mother describes Maya's attitude as follows: »Every time she has a setback, she seems to rebound with twice the positive attitude« (115). And according to Cat »[Maya's] soul doesn't need any loosening […]« (15), characterizing her as an optimistic and cheerful person. The fact that this statement is directly connected to her treatments for her CF (loosening the mucus in her lungs, 15) underlines the implicit assumption that because of her disease, one might expect Maya to be sad or unhappy. However, her positive personality is intricately connected to her cystic fibrosis and Maya is not happy and optimistic in spite of but *because* of her illness.

Fig. 8: *Ghosts* (Telgemeier, 162).

Overall, *Ghosts* portrays Maya as ›wise beyond her years‹. The angel costume, which she wears during the last third of the graphic novel, explicitly underlines her role of a prophet or bearer of wisdom. This becomes clear when she asks Cat to return to *día de los muertos* celebration to talk to the ghosts to overcome her (i.e. Cat's) fear of death: »But don't do it for me… / Do it for yourself« (176). Throughout the narrative, she continually calms down her

sister by telling her to breathe (25f; 177). Her favorite »Princess song« (26) seems to be a variation of the FROZEN theme song »Let it go« (with the text »Let it out, let it out, can't hold it in gotta shout«)[9]. Apparently, Maya has altered the words of the song to fit her own experience, which further underlines her wisdom. As mentioned above, it appears that her disease has made her curious of death but in contrast to her older sister, she seems to have accepted her fate of having to die young. This is already shown at the beginning of *Ghosts* when Maya tells her sister that »Dying isn't pretend, Cat. It's real« (72). Rather than worrying about the process of death or how much time she might have left, Maya worries about her sister and the impact her death will have on Cat. We learn this when Maya meets the ghost José later in the comic: She then selflessly voices her concerns about her sister not being able to make any new friends once she (Maya) has died (224f.), instead of asking her primary question of what happens when you die (72). This illustrates how the focus of the narrative clearly lies with the older, healthy sister Cat and her emotions regarding Maya's death.

Even though Maya also asks about herself being able to make new friends after her death, any other concern for her own well-being, fears about having to suffer pain, or anger and grief about having a reduced life expectancy are not addressed by Maya. Instead, José talks to *Cat* about how he died and what dying is like (201f.). The reader and Cat receive the comforting information that dying for José was simple and painless (»One minute I was me … / the next minute I was still me but like this [a ghost]« 202). This information would certainly have given comfort not only to Cat but to Maya as well. However, Maya happily accepts José's assertions that there are »certain benefits to being a ghost« (ibid.), namely the freedom from physical constraints: »We [ghosts] can run faster / jump higher / and dance longer than any mortal […] although we do get a little winded sometimes …« (226, Fig. 9). Maya can,

Fig. 9: Ghosts (Telgemeier, 226).

of course, empathize with being out of breath and offers José her oxygen tube. The oxygen energizes José, who excitedly bounces through the room and the meeting ends on a happy note. José, who died at age eight (200) and is roughly Maya's age, and who likes to bounce around making cannonballs (214), just like Maya (13) is yet another link that connects Maya to death. At the same time, José provides the example of a happy ghost and, thus, a positive image of death for the two sisters. Together with the idea that Maya will be free from shortness of breath and be even physically fitter than any mortal after her death creates a positive outlook for Maya and the encounter comes as a relief for both sisters. For Cat, the magical confrontation with her Mexican heritage in the form of the ghosts helps her find a more positive connection to death. Still wearing the »La Calavera Catrina« costume[10] (BBC, n. pag.) that connects her to the positive attitude towards death in Mexican culture that Telgemeier constructs in *Ghosts*, she starts making hopeful plans for the future: »Next year you've got to come to the party with me« (233).

As I have illustrated above, the narrative's focus does not lie with the representation of cystic fibrosis, but with a more general overcoming of the fear of loss and death. This is underlined through the narrative agency of the healthy Cat and the overall amount of representational energy that is invested in the symbolic rendering of death through the *día de los muertos* and the ghosts and that takes far more room in the narrative than the few panel sequences that illustrate cystic fibrosis. Therefore, Ghosts might ultimately be read as suggesting that dying and becoming a ghost (at least in the story world of the graphic novel) might be preferable to the reality of living with cystic fibrosis. In the next section, I will examine the function of cystic fibrosis in *Ghosts* more closely.

»Cough cough, wheeze wheeze« (again): Reading *Ghosts* from a Cystic Fibrosis Perspective

Having analyzed *Ghosts* from a literary disability studies perspective, I will now regard the comic from my position as an ›affected scholar‹. Since I am a cystic fibrosis patient myself, I bring my identity and personal illness experience as well as my emotional entanglement with cystic fibrosis to my analysis of *Ghosts*, which gives me the possibility to bring a different angle to my reading.

While reading *Ghosts*, I wondered why Raina Telgemeier chose cystic fibrosis as a disease for Maya in the first place. Since cystic fibrosis patients may benefit from saltier sea-side climate (Peck, n. pag.), Maya's disease gives an incentive for the Allende-Delmar family to relocate to Northern California, which sets the graphic novel's story in motion. Other than that, cystic fibrosis is an autosomal recessive disease which lets Telgemeier construct a family with two healthy parents and one sick and one healthy child, so that her narrative can explore the

impact that the disease has on the healthy older sister. Additionally, cystic fibrosis is a fatal disease, which enables Telgemeier to narrate a story around a character that very early in her life is confronted with the possibility of dying.

In the afterword Telgemeier herself writes: »I chose to write about cystic fibrosis because breathing is a huge theme in this story. Ghosts can't breathe and Maya can't breathe very well herself. Cat has normal lungs, but she is often anxious and sometimes needs to be reminded to stop and breathe deeply« (243). This explanation illustrates that Maya's disease has a metaphorical function in the story. Choosing cystic fibrosis as a disease that causes breathlessness lets Telgemeier connect Maya to death through the figures of the ghosts that personify death and that Telgemeier also characterizes as out of breath. Thus, cystic fibrosis ultimately comes to signify death by analogy. In contrast to Cat, who is literally breathless with fear for her sister, Maya is represented as fearless – in spite of her breathlessness from cystic fibrosis. This also becomes clear in the scenes when Maya has to remind Cat to breathe in an attempt to calm her down (25; 177) and shows a reversal of roles, with the younger sister taking care of the older. Thereby Telgemeier shows that Maya tries to pass on her calmness to her older sister, which suggests that she – in contrast to Cat – has accepted her cystic fibrosis and, thus, her shortened life expectancy.

Being confronted with our own mortality is not easy. I was around six years old when I understood that cystic fibrosis is a fatal disease. I have been lucky enough to defy doctors' predictions that I would not live past age 18, but constant insecurity with regard to my future takes its toll. Maybe not surprisingly, given this constant insecurity, a third of adults with CF suffer from anxiety and »studies have documented rates of depression ranging from 8% to 29% in children and adolescents and from 13% to 33% in adults [with CF]« (The Lancet Respiratory Medicine, 823). Having cystic fibrosis comes with a complex bag of emotions, not all of which are represented in Raina Telgemeier's comic. While I can empathize with many of Maya's experiences, such as her frustration over not being able to participate in an activity because of her health, the emotions with which Maya regards her illness seem reductive. Maya never complains of fatigue or pain (such as stomach aches from fatty food combined with wrongly dosed enzymes), or is annoyed about the long periods of time spent doing treatments or attending care center appointments. She rarely seems to be sad about her disease and does not express fear of the future. While Maya is allowed to express sadness, she does not seem to feel emotions like fear, anger or grief that might stand in contrast with her positive nature. *Ghosts*' narrative thus reduces the complexity of possible emotions felt by cystic fibrosis patients to occasional sadness and optimism, mostly disregarding emotions such as anger or fear that might characterize difficulties of accepting life with CF. This reduction, along with her angelic compliance with her medical regime and her happiness turn Maya into an object of inspiration for non-disabled readers.

While Maya's physical treatments are mostly accurately portrayed, the narrative also shies away from other bodily aspects of cystic fibrosis, such as problems of indigestion or the fact that the vest is used to cough up (and spit out) the sticky mucus that clogs the lungs. Although this may not be appealing information for the reader, given its didactic angle, the graphic novel could also have helped to normalize these aspects of CF life, which are often associated with shame or discomfort.

Maya's character seems to be modeled on Telgemeier's cousin Sabina Costello, who died of cancer, aged thirteen and who Telgemeier characterizes in her »Thank you« as »one of the most inspiring kids I ever met: spirited, joyful, and not interested in letting her illness define her or slow her down« (246). While I do not intend to question Telgemeier's portrayal of her cousin, the reduction of sick or disabled characters to inspirational characters is a stereotypical disability trope and has rightly been challenged as »inspiration porn« by the late Stella Young:

> And I use the term porn deliberately, because they objectify one group of people for the benefit of another group of people. So in this case, we're objectifying disabled people for the benefit of nondisabled people. The purpose of these images is to inspire you, to motivate you, so that we can look at them and think, ›Well, however bad my life is, it could be worse. I could be that person‹. (Young, TEDxSydney).

Inspiration porn thus reduces disabled people to a mere inspirational narrative function and these fictional representations in turn influence the real-life perception of actual people living with illnesses or disabilities. As Brad Dell, another cystic fibrosis patient, aptly points out, the struggle of having to appear heroic or inspirational and not being able to express negative emotions can actually be damaging because it may force us to hide our suffering to fulfill the hero role (Dell b, n. pag.), and it may make us more reluctant to seek help for mental health concerns.

While the term ›inspiration porn‹ might not do full justice the more nuanced portrayal of Maya in the course of the novel, she is, contrary to Telgemeier's cousin, very much defined by her disease. In terms of the emotional side of cystic fibrosis, the focus of *Ghosts* lies clearly with Cat's acceptance of her sister's disease and the overcoming of her fear of death, and not with the emotional struggles that Maya might face. As I have outlined above, the narrative focuses instead on Cat's journey towards accepting her sister's illness and early death, which she achieves through her involvement with her Mexican heritage during the *día de los muertos* celebrations, which, in the end, makes *Ghosts* a narrative that uses cystic fibrosis as a plot device, but that is not, specifically, about life with CF.

Ghosts, even though it focuses mostly on the healthy Catrina, is also an illness narrative, or ›sick-lit‹. Many people experience illness as »an interruption of their lives« based on the assumption that »illness is temporary, of short duration, and with a predictable outcome: recovery« (Charmaz, 13). This trope also structures the illness narrative (Schubert, 266).

However, when illness becomes chronic, these assumptions and the narrative of »illness as interruption« no longer work. People with chronic illnesses or disabilities often live outside of a »linear progressive time with its normal life stages« (Samuels 2017b, n. pag.). We experience impairments in the present for which we are deemed too young, and, specifically with cystic fibrosis, »[we live our] entire lives near, at, or even a few years beyond [our] assumed life expectancy« (Schubert, 266), which results in »an absence of a long-term future« (ibid., 269).

This lack of a future might be another the reasons why cystic fibrosis lends itself to the narrative of *Ghosts*, because the shortened life expectancy might make one assume that CF patients live more in the moment and enjoy life more consciously, as the characterization of Maya suggests. I cannot speak for other cystic fibrosis patients, but I agree with Michele Lent Hirsch that popular culture often portrays people who have been confronted with their own mortality as »more alive and seize-the-day-y« than others (201) – a characterization of us that I see as detrimental for patients with chronic illnesses. Trying to enjoy life to the fullest is certainly a great concept – as Maya puts it: »Why not let me have fun while I still can?« – but the requirements of the small everyday things and the demands of our bodies to take breaks (cf. Samuels 2017b, n. pag.) make it hard to always make the most of every day. Cystic fibrosis is a demanding disease in terms of time spent doing treatments and one of its effects can be chronic fatigue (Jarad et al., 241) that makes it hard to always live life to the fullest, especially if the outside expectation is that we should be »inspirational« and never let our disease »define us«, as Telgemeier writes about her cousin (246).

But even though cystic fibrosis is a difficult disease that shortens life, patients usually do no longer die in early childhood. In her afterword, Telgemeier writes: »While there is no cure, improved treatments for CF have greatly extended the life expectancy of patients« (243). However, in *Ghosts*, CF is portrayed as a disease that leads to death in childhood, and that has no treatment options once a patient's lungs have deteriorated beyond a certain point. The possibility of a lung transplant, an option which »should be considered for all patients in end-stage lung disease« (Antoniou & Elston, 323), is not explored further in the narrative, but could have provided a more hopeful lookout for Maya. *Ghosts* (2016) also does not mention medications, available since 2012, that specifically target the underlying genetic causes of cystic fibrosis by modifying the faulty CFTR-protein have been introduced, which have shown a significant improvement of lung function and reduction of infections in CF patients (Fajac & De Boek, 206), another point that could have given the story a more realistic, hopeful perspective. Since there are so few existing fictional portrayals of cystic fibrosis, it should be even more important to give a more well-rounded depiction of the disease that does not reduce cystic fibrosis to a narrative prosthesis.[11]

Conclusion

Analyzing *Ghosts* both from a literary disability studies perspective and with my personal illness experience in mind, I have shown that bringing one's personal experience and emotional involvement can actually create a productive, critical reading of a fictional text and that confronting our disability identities and emotional involvement needs not make our readings unscientific or reductive. Since *Ghosts* does not give the patient Maya much of a voice, I have highlighted the emotional reduction of Maya's character and added some aspects of cystic fibrosis that the graphic novel does not consider, such as recent medical developments in genetic medicine or the option of a lung transplant. My analysis has examined how Telgemeier's portrayal of cystic fibrosis is motivated by the needs of the narrative and reproduces pervasive tropes of inspiration and reductive characterization. As I have shown, *Ghosts* seems written with a nondisabled reader in mind who can marvel at Maya's strength and optimism or empathize with Cat's fear of losing her sister. Keeping in mind that *Ghosts* is a narrative for younger readers, which also tries to explain cystic fibrosis in an adequate manner, the narrative portrays many of Maya's treatments accurately and addresses some difficult emotions well. However, it does so mostly through the perspective of an older sister. While applauding the effort to make my disease known to a wider reading public, I would have wished for a deeper insight into Maya's perspective, since it is still far too rare that people with disabilities or chronic illnesses take center stage in narratives about their lives.

Born slightly before the discovery of the CF gene in 1989 and with the hope of genetic treatment and a longer life expectancy ahead (cf. Schubert, 268f.), I have grown up with a different, more hopeful perspective on cystic fibrosis than the one portrayed in *Ghosts*. As a disability studies scholar, aware of the few fictional portrayals of cystic fibrosis and of the impact that these representations may have on real-life ideas about people with chronic illnesses or disabilities, I would certainly have wished for a less bleak and more realistic depiction of the disease.

Ideally, more of today's illness narratives would follow Arthur Frank's, who writes: »Those who have been objects of other reports are now telling their own stories. As they do so, they define the ethic of our times: an ethic of voice, affording each a right to speak her own truth, in her own words« (Frank, xxxi). Until then, as pointed out above, disability studies has to try and restore some of the perspectives that are silenced, forgotten or overlooked in these narratives. I have tried to do so by integrating my thoughts and emotions as a cystic fibrosis patient into my scholarly analysis, speaking from the position of an ›affected scholar‹.

***

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1] ›Crip‹, similar to ›queer‹ is a derogatory term that was reclaimed by activists to connote a positive, disability pride-based identity that at the same time pinpoints the continued exclusion of people with disabilities (McRuer, 19). When Kafer uses ›crip‹, she indicates that the problem she refers to is part of the disability activism and studies community.

2] That is, if one has the choice to pass as non-disabled, which, of course, not all people with disabilities have.

3] More detailed information about cystic fibrosis can be found at cff.org (US) and muko.info (GER).

4] Brad Dell (a, n. pag.) lists a few of the existing depictions, among them also Telgemeier's graphic novel, and the fictional character Emma Decody in the thriller series Bates Motel. The medical drama series Grey's Anatomy (maybe less surprisingly) also features several patient-characters with CF. While a few pathographies ((auto)biographical illness narratives) on CF are available, fiction featuring the disease is even rarer, with a few children and young adult novels appearing only in the last two years, among them *Caleb and Kit* (Beth Vrabel, 2017), *Dead Girls Society* (Michelle Krys, 2016) and *No One dies in the Garden of Syn* (Michael Seidelmann, 2016).

5] Other than *Ghosts*, three other comics deal with cystic fibrosis but neither tells a longer narrative with a cystic fibrosis-patient protagonist. *Carriers. A Webcomic on Health, Luck and Life* (Lauren A. Weinstein, 2014), is a graphic memoir that details the fears of a pregnant woman that her unborn child could have cystic fibrosis. Andrew Godfrey's *The CF Diaries* (2011) also provides an autobiographical look at living with CF. *508. A Digital Comic Book for Children with Cystic Fibrosis* (Wade Wooley & Sean Moffat, n. dat.) depicts a young CF-patient, Wesley, who imagines his chest physical therapy as a space adventure and was explicitly written with the aim to »inspire and empower children with cystic fibrosis« (amazon.com).

6] Telgemeier uses yellow speech bubbles, sometimes with red text, to indicate high volume.

7] High-Frequency Chest Wall Oscillation, colloquially called the ›vest‹, is a common breathing treatment for cystic fibrosis, used mainly in the United States. The technique »involves an inflatable vest that is attached to a machine. The machine mechanically performs chest physical therapy by vibrating at a high frequency. The vest vibrates the chest to loosen and thin mucus. Every five minutes, the person stops the machine and coughs or huffs« (CFF c).

8] Actually, Cat might well be a carrier of the CF gene and have the risk of passing on the disease to her children. This aspect is not mentioned in the narrative but troubles the clear-cut distinction between health and illness that the comic represents.

9] This reading is supported by a drawing of a poster in Maya's room that very closely resembles the Disney princesses Elsa and Anna (115).

10] La Calavera Catrina, the figure of female skeleton with a grand hat, has become a central icon of the Mexican Day of the Dead-celebration (BBC, n. pag.). The figure was originally created by cartoonist José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) and was later included in Diego Rivera's famous mural *Sueño de una tarde de domingo en la Alameda* (1948) and adapted in Tim Burton's Corpse Bride (2005) and has gained wide popularity, especially as a Day of the Dead-costume (ibid.).

11] »Narrative prosthesis« is a term coined by David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2000) and describes, in short, how authors often tend to use a disability as a device for characterization: »[I]n stories about characters with disabilities, an underlying issue is always whether their disability is the foundation of character itself« (6).

CLOSURE
Kieler e-Journal für Comicforschung

Readable Space and Practice

OCD in *Fun Home* and in *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*

Sigrid Thomsen (Wien)

Introduction

In Alison Bechdel's 2006 comic *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* and Justin Green's 1995 comic *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, we see the protagonists scribble over their own writing, doing incantations and painstakingly weaving their way around buildings so as to protect themselves from so-called »penis rays«. These instances point us to what unites these two otherwise very different works: Both autobiographical comics discuss young people navigating OCD, and this focus on coping strategies is explicitly noted by both Bechdel and Green. Bechdel starts her chapter on OCD with the line »My actual obsessive-compulsive disorder began when I was ten« (*Fun Home*, 135) and Green prefaces his *Binky Brown Sampler* with a foreword saying: »O, my readers, the saga of Binky Brown is not intended solely for your entertainment, but also to purge myself of the compulsive neurosis which I have served since I officially left Catholicism on Halloween, 1958« (*Binky Brown Sampler*, 10). Though the two kinds of OCD depicted in both comics are quite different, they do share some characteristics. OCD, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, »is a common, chronic and long-lasting disorder in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts (obsessions) and behaviors (compulsions) that he or she feels the urge to repeat over and over« (*National Institute of Mental Health*, n.p.). In *Binky Brown*, the disorder appears mostly in the form of obsessions, namely uncontrollable visions of penis rays, and constitutes the main focus of the work. In *Fun Home*, meanwhile, the disorder consists mostly of compulsions related to writing and counting and is portrayed as merely one aspect of Alison's childhood.[1]

In this paper, I will analyze the ways the comics (*Fun Home* and *Binky Brown*) and the types of OCD depicted are spatial and creative practices, as they involve negotiating the relation between the interior and the exterior, between the body and other exterior objects, and between words and what they signify. After discussing OCD and comics in broader terms, I

will first look at *Fun Home* before discussing *Binky Brown* in order to compare the depiction of OCD in these two works. If, as Doel and Segrott argue, »[t]he problem that faces those who endure OCD [...]is that sometimes life does not slip into place, but that it slips out of place« (Doel/Segrott 2004, 611), comics is perhaps more fitted than any other medium to show some of the places where life slipped out of place: Because of its simultaneity of images and words and the placing of panels right next to each other, comics can depict the places where the inside of one's mind and the exterior world don't easily fit together. This is the case when the OCD alters one's perception of outside events, and when the minutiae of daily life is punctured by flashes of obsessive thoughts.

Space in Comics

Tensions between the outer and the inner are a characteristic strength of comics even when it doesn't deal with OCD. As Harry Naybors, a somewhat obnoxious character in Daniel Clowes' *Ice Haven*, states,

> While prose tends toward pure ›interiority,‹ coming to life in the reader's mind, and cinema gravitates toward the ›exteriority‹ of experiential spectacle, perhaps ›comics,‹ in its embrace of both the interiority of the written word and the physicality of image, more closely replicates the true nature of human consciousness and the struggle between private self-definition and corporeal ›reality‹ (Clowes 2005, 4).

At least since Descartes, this tension of interiority and exteriority has figured prominently in Western thought, and that comics can do this tension justice is, as Naybors says, one of the medium's general advantages. Accordingly, comics have often been discussed in spatial terms – in »The Architecture of Comics", Catherine Labio writes about the »architectural unconscious of the comics page«, arguing that »[t]his architectural precedence [...] turns the page into an identifiable and measurable space« (Labio 2015, 317) for the reader. This spatial aspect of comics is linked to its depiction of time: In *Anatomie des Comics*, Stephen Packard makes the case that time can only be depicted in comics through space (cf. Packard 2006, 180).

Space, and how bodies move through it, are important aspects both of Alison's and Binky's OCD and of the comics which depict it. For those affected by OCD, »the relations between the embodied self and an affective environment« (Doel/Segrott 2004, 609) have to be constantly renegotiated and come to terms with; the body has to find its place among the invisible substances and the threatening rays that the OCD conjures up. Many of the compulsions depicted in *Fun Home* and *Binky Brown* are contingent on the body. Comics, too, is related to embodiment, as numerous scholars have argued both about comics in general and about *Fun Home* in particular. Firstly, a comic bears the imprint of the artist's

body – every artist has their own style, and in conjunction with coloring and lettering, looking at comics one is reminded of the different hands – and therefore bodies – that have contributed to it. In *Graphic Women*, Hillary Chute claims that, »[c]omics is largely a hand-drawn form that registers the subjective bodily mark on the page; its marks are an index of the body« (Chute 2011, 112). Secondly, while prose describes bodies, leaving the reader to imagine them as they wish, comics *depict* bodies. While some of the embodiment may be left to the imagination, since the reader is free to imagine a comic character as life-size and three-dimensional, there is already a version of a body, whole unto itself, on the page. As Warhol-Down writes,

> [t]he images of the wide-eyed little girl, the grimacing teenager, the depressed college student [...] correspond to what in prose narrative would be called Alison the character, but in their pen-and-ink materiality they exist independently of what we mean when we talk about characters in prose texts (Warhol 2011, 3-4).

Thirdly, and not insignificantly, in many cases comics are still read as physical objects, thereby including the reader in an embodied relationship between the artist(s), the comic and the reader. In *Fun Home*, this is especially marked on page 100, where Alison's hand is in the left-hand corner of the page, just where the reader's hand most likely is, holding a photo of her father's lover, and Alison's babysitter, Roy. Here, Alison's drawn hand and the reader's overlap, holding the photo of Roy together (see fig. 1). In *Comics Form and Narrating Lives*, Chute writes that, »if comics is about mapping, it is also about bodies – about locating them in space and time« (Chute 2011, 112), arguing elsewhere that *Fun Home* is »a profoundly bodily book« (Chute 2010, 195). The artist's hand and the comic character's body are entangled and fixed on the page, which in all likelihood is held, and further fixed in space and time, in the reader's hands.

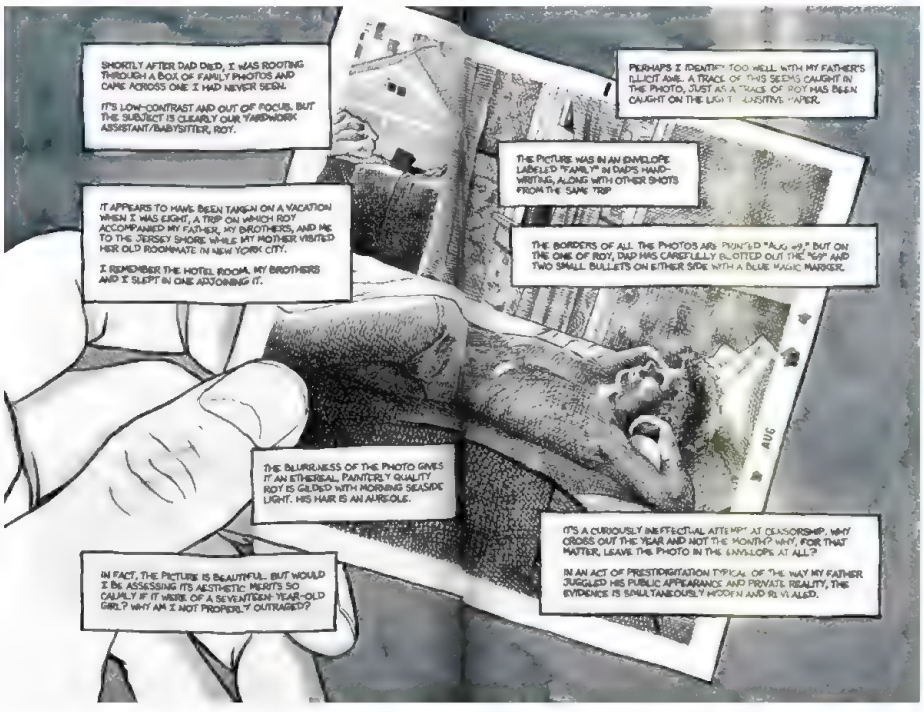

SHORTLY AFTER DAD DIED, I WAS ROOTING THROUGH A BOX OF FAMILY PHOTOS AND CAME ACROSS ONE I HAD NEVER SEEN.
IT'S LOW-CONTRAST AND OUT OF FOCUS, BUT THE SUBJECT IS CLEARLY OUR YARDWORK ASSISTANT/BABYSITTER, ROY.
IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN ON A VACATION WHEN I WAS EIGHT, A TRIP ON WHICH ROY ACCOMPANIED MY FATHER, MY BROTHERS, AND ME TO THE JERSEY SHORE WHILE MY MOTHER VISITED HER OLD ROOMMATE IN NEW YORK CITY.
I REMEMBER THE HOTEL ROOM. MY BROTHERS AND I SLEPT IN ONE ADJOINING IT.
PERHAPS I IDENTIFY TOO WELL WITH MY FATHER'S ILLICIT AIM. A TRACE OF THIS SEEMS CAUGHT IN THE PHOTO, JUST AS A TRACE OF ROY HAS BEEN CAUGHT ON THE LIGHT-SENSITIVE PAPER.
THE PICTURE WAS IN AN ENVELOPE LABELED "FAMILY" IN DAD'S HANDWRITING, ALONG WITH OTHER SHOTS FROM THE SAME TRIP.
THE BORDERS OF ALL THE PHOTOS ARE PRINTED "AUG '63," BUT ON THE ONE OF ROY, DAD HAS CAREFULLY BLOTTED OUT THE "63" AND TWO SMALL BULLETS ON EITHER SIDE WITH A BLUE MAGIC MARKER.
THE BLURRINESS OF THE PHOTO GIVES IT AN ETHEREAL, PAINTERLY QUALITY. ROY IS GILDED WITH MORNING SEASIDE LIGHT. HIS HAIR IS AN AUREOLE.
IT'S A CURIOUSLY INEFFECTUAL ATTEMPT AT CENSORSHIP. WHY CROSS OUT THE YEAR AND NOT THE MONTH? WHY, FOR THAT MATTER, LEAVE THE PHOTO IN THE ENVELOPE AT ALL?
IN AN ACT OF PRESTIDIGITATION TYPICAL OF THE WAY MY FATHER JUGGLED HIS PUBLIC APPEARANCE AND PRIVATE REALITY, THE EVIDENCE IS SIMULTANEOUSLY HIDDEN AND REVEALED.
IN FACT, THE PICTURE IS BEAUTIFUL. BUT WOULD I BE ASSESSING ITS AESTHETIC MERITS SO CALMLY IF IT WERE OF A SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL? WHY AM I NOT PROPERLY OUTRAGED?
AUG

Fig. 1: The double-page hints at the reader holding the book (*FH*, 100-101).

Creative Strategies in OCD Behavior and Comics

OCD and comics both involve and necessitate creativity from those who perform them. That this is the case in comics hardly needs to be said; for OCD this is a less obvious point to make. In *Disturbing Geography: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder as Spatial Practice*, Marcus A. Doel and Jeremy Segrott argue that »whilst the disorder [of OCD] produces intense emotions of anxiety, fear and discomfort, it also frequently engenders creative forms of action« (Doel/Segrott 2004, 609). They go on to elaborate that compulsions are »creative in the sense that they compel the self to take some form of overt, covert or mental action« (Doel/Segrott 2004, 602). In *Fun Home* and *Binky Brown*, Bechdel and Green portray the creative mental and physical actions that their protagonists Alison and Binky, respectively, have to perform in order to gain momentary release from their OCD. In doing so, Bechdel and Green add another creative layer to their engagement with OCD: They depict the creativity of OCD via the creativity of comics.

Autobiography and the Problem of Author Psychology

In writing about an autobiographical comic such as *Fun Home*, there is a certain danger to descend into ruminations about the author's psyche, especially in the context of a psychological disorder such as OCD. This I want to avoid. But it is nonetheless important to keep the autobiographic layering in mind where it plays a role, such as in the juxtaposition of Alison at different stages of her life. In »The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death«, Bechdel switches between drawing college-aged Alison shortly before her father's death and young Alison struggling with OCD. Not only does this layering of depictions of Alison at different stages in her life point toward an adult Alison (mirroring Bechdel's own experiences), but it also hints at an underlying theme of *Fun Home*, and of this chapter in particular: Alison becoming an artist, which is portrayed through her engagement with literature and her own drawing and journal-writing as a child.

One manifestation of Alison's OCD is that she draws carets over her own writing in order to signify her existential uncertainty as to whether what she has just written is true. In order to depict these journal entries in the comic, Bechdel painstakingly recreates her younger self's diary entries: Not only the meaning of the words but, more importantly, their shape, their curves and tilts, her own handwriting from decades before (see fig. 2).

Alison draws the carets in order to mark her epistemological uncertainty. And Bechdel, too, drew carets over the words in the writing of the comic – this time not out of any compulsive fear, but in order to *re-inhabit* this fear. Much has been written about Bechdel's reinscribing and reembodying of her own past. In the diaries, »Alison's handwritten trace […] is a mark of the (former) presence of her subjective body« (Kashtan 2013, 96), to which is

added the layer of Bechdel's recreation of it. In »The Space Between: A Narrative Approach to Alison Bechdel's Fun Home«, Warhol-Down links this recreating of the archive to embodiment, claiming that »The materiality implied by those images works together with other features of the text to give *Fun Home* an aura of embodiment« (Warhol-Down 2011, 6), while Cynthia Barounis writes that, »Bechdel both inhabits psychiatric diagnosis while performing its deconstruction« (Barounis 2016, 148).

MY I THINKS WERE GOSSAMER SUTURES IN THAT GAPING RIFT BETWEEN SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED. TO FORTIFY THEM, I PERSEVERATED UNTIL THEY WERE BLOTS.
Thursday MAY 6
Steve N. broke his arm
Steve C. cut his leg with a Machete knife at camp. He fainted! Mothe
her hair done. I
a page of math. Dad helped me.
MY DIARY WAS RAPIDLY BECOMING AS ONEROUS AS THE REST OF MY LIFE.
MY MOTHER APPARENTLY DECIDED THAT GIVING ME SOME ATTENTION MIGHT HELP, AND BEGAN READING TO ME WHILE I HAD MY BATH. BUT IT WAS TOO MUCH, TOO LATE.
...113, 114, 115, 116...
...FOR OF WHAT USE TO ANYONE WAS A CRIPPLE-HANDED SILVERSMITH?
DRIP DRIBBLE DRIP
I WAS SO CONSUMED WITH ANXIETY THAT SHE WOULD STOP, THAT I COULDN'T ENJOY IT.
MATTERS WORSENED IN MY DIARY. TO SAVE TIME I CREATED A SHORTHAND VERSION OF I THINK, A CURVY CIRCUMFLEX.
SOON I BEGAN DRAWING IT RIGHT OVER NAMES AND PRONOUNS. IT BECAME A SORT OF AMULET, WARDING OFF EVIL FROM MY SUBJECTS.
School. Tammi came down. We played casket with an old box. Dad wanted me to sweep the patio. He said I
Sun JUNE 13
Mother + I went to church. Molly came home with us. We went swimming. Dad + I brought up the cushions for the

Fig. 2: Panels portraying Alison's progressively obscured diary frame a scene with her mother (FH, 142).

Justin Green is the writer of *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, in which he portrays the tribulations of the obsessed protagonist Binky Brown. In addition to referring to his own OCD in the foreword, Green delineates the different kinds of treatment for OCD that he has undergone in the afterword. If he is not interested in keeping it a secret that *Binky Brown* is about him, why create an alias? Why not call the protagonist Justin, just like the protagonist of *Fun Home* is called Alison? This choice of pseudonym or alter ego achieves several things. Firstly and most obviously, it enables Green to tell the story of his mental illness while retaining some hint of anonymity. The very casual reader, or the reader of another edition, might not know that this book is based on Green's experience. That the name is a mask allows Green to play with the idea of representation. It doesn't keep him from being recognized by people who pay attention but does allow him some leeway and fun with and within his own history. The alliteration of the name »Binky Brown" is further reminiscent of civil names in superhero comics, such as Peter Parker, Lois Lane, Clark Kent and Stephen Strange, but the name »Binky« breaks with any easy notion of super-heroism: Binky, a Catholic schoolboy whose life is governed by his OCD, is far removed from the heroic grandeur of superhero comics.[2] Hinting at the world of superheroes, however, locates the work within the same realm as those other comics, all the while emphasizing the difference of *Binky Brown* to mainstream comics, as well as the difference between Binky's challenges and those faced by someone like Lois Lane.

The following shows how the comics *Fun Home* and *Binky Brown* represent OCD as something that is not only superficially spatial due to its necessarily spatial depiction in comic panels, but spatial in complex ways which make it *necessary* for it to be depicted in a medium that does not rely on words alone.

Fun Home

In *Fun Home*, OCD appears most explicitly in Chapter 5, »The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death«. In this chapter, Alison likens her family home to »an artists' colony. We ate together, but otherwise were absorbed in our separate pursuits. And in this isolation, our creativity took on an aspect of compulsion« (*FH*, 134). In the very next panel, she switches the focus: From her family to herself, and from something with a hint of compulsion to an illness: »My actual obsessive-compulsive disorder began when I was ten« (*FH*, 135). As Barounis writes, »Alison's OCD is presented to the reader as a lived experience, interwoven into the mundane rituals of everyday life« (Barounis 2016, 145), and the next few panels show these rituals and their accompanying compulsions: Her compulsive counting; her feeling that »odd numbers and multiples of thirteen were to be avoided at all costs« (*FH*, 135); her difficulty in crossing thresholds due to her having to »tabulate the number of edges of flooring« (*FH*, 135) she sees there, »[t]he same convoluted and multi-layered interiors that serve her father's need for concealment threaten[ing] to paralyse Alison« (Lydenberg 2012, 64). Next, we learn about »the invisible substance that hung in doorways, and that, I soon realized, hung like swags of drapery between all solid objects« (*FH*, 135). In the first panel on the next page, Alison is walking towards the school. At first glance, nothing about the panel seems unusual, but then we see that Alison's hand is outstretched at an odd angle: »This [the substance] had to be gathered and dispersed constantly, to keep it away from my body – to avoid in particular inhaling or swallowing it« (*FH*, 136). Other panels depict her compulsion to kiss her stuffed animals goodnight, or to align her shoes perfectly and put her clothes on in the right order. All of these practices can be summed up in »Life had become a laborious round of chores« (*FH*, 137). Describing her obsession as chores alludes to the domestic space her rituals take place in. Alison's compulsive chores make the space of the house habitable.

Alison's relationship to space is also mediated through her relationship to the objects around her: It is the way they are positioned that she finds jarring and even unbearable. It is this arrangement of objects in space that determines whether, and how, she can move through that space. As she is constantly counting, everyday objects gain additional meaning by being connected to a numerical system in which odd numbers and multiples of thirteen are to be avoided. The edges of flooring in the threshold have to be an even number so that she can pass, and she has to keep including additional subdivisions in her counting until the

number is even. Alison has developed a heightened awareness for these details in the objects around her; the threshold necessarily looks different to her because it is so visible and so closely looked at, and an odd number of plates is of a different visual quality than an even number of plates. Accordingly, it looks different for the reader as Alison zooms in closer. In the panel in which we see Alison's feet standing in front of the threshold, we see exactly what she would see looking down. In the next panel, only the tips of her shoes are visible, along with the panel; within that panel, Bechdel overlays the threshold with a magnifying glass, which shows part of the paneling in even more detail. It would be physically impossible for Alison to look at the threshold so closely unless she bent down, of which we see no indication in the panel, but by showing us the threshold with gradually more detail, Bechdel is drawing us into Alison's altered perception of objects due to the OCD: It is not enough to look at an object just once, or even twice, in order to feel certain about its properties and the OCD-required response to it; its details demand oft-repeated and vigilant attention.

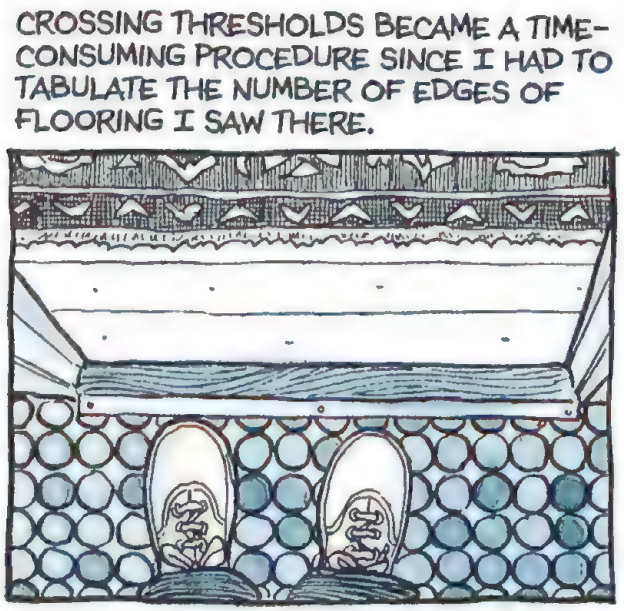

CROSSING THRESHOLDS BECAME A TIME-CONSUMING PROCEDURE SINCE I HAD TO TABULATE THE NUMBER OF EDGES OF FLOORING I SAW THERE.

Fig. 3: Alison in front of the threshold (*FH*, 135).

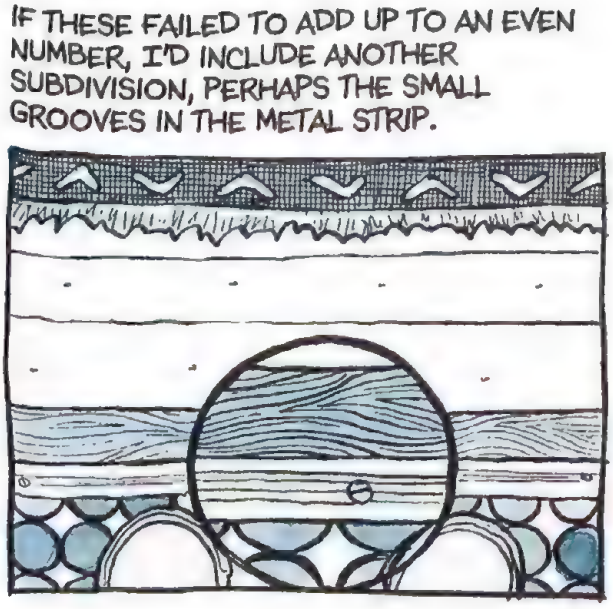


Fig. 4: Alison zooms in (*FH*, 135).

Her type of OCD also changes the spatial reality of her world and introduces new objects into it: Alison sees all the things she's always seen, but in addition, she starts to experience the »invisible substance« (*FH*, 135) hanging between these objects: »Then came the invisible substance that hung in doorways, and that, I soon realized, hung like swags of drapery between all solid objects« (*FH*, 135). This leads her to visibly react to the substance by attempting to locate it with her hand, to shield herself from it and disperse it, thus confounding those around her by altering the visual reality of their world, too. When Alison can't disperse the »noxious substance« (*FH*, 136) to her satisfaction or is unable to »successfully

navigate a doorway« (*FH*, 135), she has to recite an incantation of her invention, and, if needed, repeat the incantation with accompanying hand gestures. The linguistic status of this incantation is dubious. In a panel on page 136, it is written within Alison's speech bubble, but as a reader we are not able to decipher it. The arcane words are beyond our understanding; the lines clearly resemble writing, but its content is not accessible to us. The bodily performed incantation, however, renders visible what has been illegible. What had been an odd, inconspicuous gesture on her way to school becomes a wiggling of both hands while doing an incantation, prompting one of her brothers to call out, »MOMM! She's doin' it!« (*FH*, 136). In her experience of her OCD, Alison cannot distinguish between the significance of the objects present at the table and the substance that she sees. In *Fun Home*, which depicts the world from Alison's point of view in some panels but not in others, the substance is paradoxical: The reader does not see the substance, but does see Alison's reaction to it, her hand raised, her expression unreadable. While in the preceding panels, the reader sees Alison's shoes by the threshold from her point of view, in this panel the reader sees Alison as if standing across from her. The comic switches between showing the reader what it is like to live with this set of compulsions and showing what it is like to live with someone experiencing them.

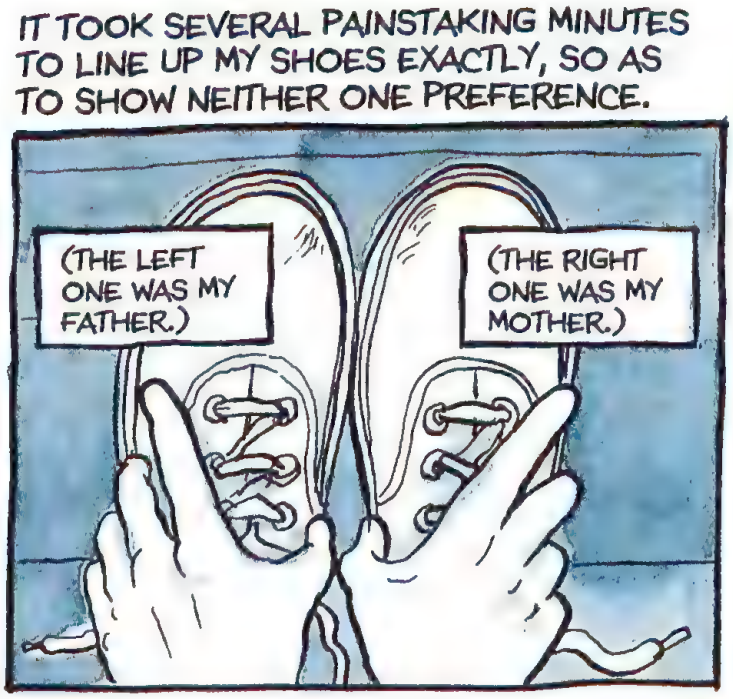
Not just in Alison's mind but in Bechdel's illustration in the comic, the substance is complexly linked to the space and objects around it. On page 137, Alison has drawn a border around her between the two poles of a swing set in order to ward off the invisible substance. The attempt is unsuccessful: »(After I cleared it away, the invisible substance would immediately replenish itself)« (*FH*, 137). The border visually mirrors both the jump rope in the background and the swing set's chains. But it is clearly a visual rendering of something Alison sees and feels rather than a realistic representation of an observable phenomenon. As such we are only one step away from filling in the gaps, as it would be possible to take up a pencil and draw the substance where Alison sees it.

LIFE HAD BECOME A LABORIOUS ROUND OF CHORES.
(AFTER I CLEARED IT AWAY, THE INVISIBLE SUBSTANCE WOULD IMMEDIATELY REPLENISH ITSELF.)

Fig. 5: Alison imagines the substance's reach (*FH*, 137).

Though it is impossible for us to see the substance, it becomes tempting to look for it in the pictures. The whiteness around objects that is characteristic of Alison Bechdel's style, in particular, can now suddenly be read as part of the substance. This paradoxical status of the substance – it doesn't occupy space but influences how Alison moves through space; we don't see it but we see the line Alison has drawn to keep it at bay – encourages the reader to look closely at the panels – and at »the white, emptied-out gutter spaces« (Chute 2010, 180) – to see where the substance might be, thus drawing us into Alison's experience while also showing us gaps in our empathizing with her.

In the panel in which we see Alison's hands arranging her two shoes, much of what I've said about comics and OCD comes together. In the gutter above the panel, it says, »It took several painstaking minutes to line up my shoes exactly, so as to show neither one preference.« Superimposed on each shoe is a textbox, one which says, »(The left one was my father.)« and one which says, »(The right one was my mother.)« (*FH*, 137).


IT TOOK SEVERAL PAINSTAKING MINUTES TO LINE UP MY SHOES EXACTLY, SO AS TO SHOW NEITHER ONE PREFERENCE.
(THE LEFT ONE WAS MY FATHER.)
(THE RIGHT ONE WAS MY MOTHER.)
Fig. 6: Alison's shoes are metaphors for her parents (*FH*, 137).

Firstly, as a compulsion, this is one of the »creative practices and complex interactions with people and objects« (Doel/Segrott 2004, 605) that allows Alison to release some tension from the relationship that she has to her mother and father. Secondly, it negotiates the space between inner and outer, as an inner situation is turned into an outer, physical situation: the situation of having to arrange the shoes. The shoes serve as stand-ins for her mother and father in this instant, and the arranging of the shoes becomes a metaphor for her relationship with her parents. Thirdly, it is about Alison's body. As Doel and Segrott write, »Living with OCD is a profound illustration of such a conception of the body as an articulation of affective relations. One's being-in-the-world is forcefully felt« (Doel/Segrott 2004, 609). It is her body that is arranging the shoes, and that is therefore also arranging her relationships to her respective parent. All of this applies just as much to Bechdel's depiction of it in this panel. The depiction is creative rather than, say, statistical, as she is turning her autobiographical experience into a panel in a graphic novel, turning it into literature and art. It is spatial because we are dealing

with a panel on a page in a physical book, and because they take up physical, touchable space on this page. It is also still about Bechdel's body – there's »the presence of the body, through the hand, as a mark in the text« (Chute 2008, 457), as she is making this panel and simultaneously, inevitably, inscribing herself and her body in it.

Alison's compulsions are a quest for precision. Each night, she kisses every one of her stuffed animals good night, »and not just in a perfunctory way« (*FH*, 137). The panel shows us Alison's bedroom, in which she is bending over her trunk full of stuffed animals, with her eyes closed, almost as if in prayer, and tenderly kissing the top of a stuffed elephant's head. In the middle of the panel, there is a textbox that says: »Though it verges on the bathetic, I should point out that no one had kissed me good night in years« (*FH*, 137). This sentence not only retroactively explains why Alison compulsively kisses her stuffed animals, but also stages Alison as the mother, the stuffed elephant as the child. Alison is here enacting a scene missing from her own life. The comic's »immediate visual ›all-at-onceness‹« (Chute 2010, 183) enables us to see these things alongside each other: First, the tender scene between Alison and her toy, then, the explanation for this compulsion, and finally, the reader might look at the same scene between Alison and the toy again, this time with added knowledge. This back and forth mirrors memory, as our memories become layered with explanations and future memories over time. This ›explanation‹ is not part of young Alison's experience as she kisses the stuffed elephant, but it is knowledge provided by the older narrative instance's self-reflexive comment, making *Fun Home* also about »the process of memory« (Chute 2006, n.p.). While these different narrative and temporal levels are clearly delineated – both by the space of the gutter and by the temporal marking of the individual comic panel, the two strategies for conveying temporal differences that Lukas Wilde mentions in »Was unterscheiden Comic-›Medien‹?« (cf. Wilde 2014, 39) – they are placed alongside each other, which creates an impression of simultaneity: Looking back onto this scene, its content cannot be separated from the narratorial comment's analysis.

The compulsions most linked to precision and to which most space is given in *Fun Home* might be those related to diary-writing. One of Alison's main compulsions is based on the written word. During her »obsessive-compulsive spell« (*FH*, 140), she begins a diary, in which the phrase »I think« soon starts appearing in between her sentences. This later devolves into blots, and later becomes a curvy caret,[3] »a sort of amulet, warding off evil from my subjects« (*FH*, 142). Similarly, as in the case with the ›noxious substance‹, what works so well in the medium of comics here is the layers which are afforded by the simultaneity of text and image, and by the simultaneity of several images on one page. Alison Bechdel recreates her younger self's handwriting, which at first fills a panel: »It was pretty warm out. I got out a Hardy Boy Book. Christian threw sand in John's face. He started to cry. I took him in. We went« (*FH*, 141). This first panel gives us the impression of seeing a young Alison unburdened with anxiety. Triggered by an »epistemological crisis« (*FH*, 141) – how is she supposed to know whether the things she writes are »absolutely, objectively true?« (*FH*, 141) – Alison starts to add »I think« to

her diary entries, in small, nearly illegible letters. These are visually highlighted in the panels of *Fun Home*: there is a blank circle-shaped area around them. This circle is the absence of printed color on the page of the book as opposed to the greenish color that is used to signify the depiction of pages in Alison's journal. They serve as spotlights for the reader's eye: What is important to note in this scene of writing is not the words written per se but a spatial practice that seeks to alter what has been written. As this practice changes – biographically over time, and in the comic from panel to panel – there is no further need for this ›spotlight‹: Alison »fortif[ies]« (*FH*, 142) the words »I think« until they change into ›blots‹, no longer legible and no longer a strictly linguistic signifier. Over time, Alison's untroubled diary entries become disfigured by the caret she invented to ward off evil. As a physical person in the world, she can protect herself against the ›noxious substance‹ by dispersing it with her hand; when she writes, she can ward off the evil that might come with writing something not completely accurate by drawing a caret on it. Seeing the panel with her diary entries, there's a juxtaposition of the clear, crisp writing in the gutters and in the panels on one hand and the child-like scrawls on the other, but in a next step there's also a juxtaposition of the happy-enough childish scrawls and the huge carets marring individual words and entire pages. Again, the practice demanded by the OCD is evolving: The caret that first serves to simplify the blotted »I think«, thereby creating a kind of meta sign system, soon starts to impair legibility once again. »In September of my obsessive-compulsive year, there was a terrible accident on route 150« (*FH*, 147), then an otherwise empty panel filled only with words: »One of the victims was a distant cousin of mine, a boy exactly my age« (*FH*, 147). This panel of meticulously lettered script is starkly opposed to the recreation of young Alison's diary: In the gutter just above these panel depicting entries for September 18 and September 19, it says, »My diary entries for that weekend are almost completely obscured« (*FH*, 148). The simple caret sign has become a surface again. On the one hand, the surface of these carets obscures the written word, but it's also the site of Alison's anxieties, as the surfaces mark of what is not to be harmed: ›We‹, ›Dad‹, ›people‹, ›mother‹, ›John‹, ›church‹, curiously also ›is‹ and ›dead‹, and not ›party‹ or ›funeral‹ and ›funeral home‹.

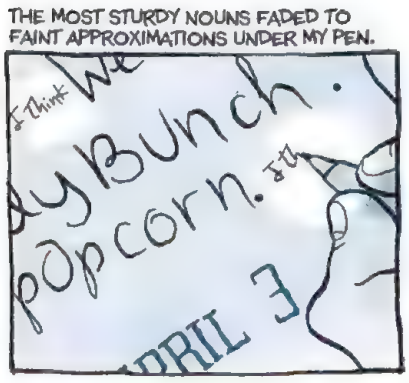


Fig. 7: »I think« (FH, 141).

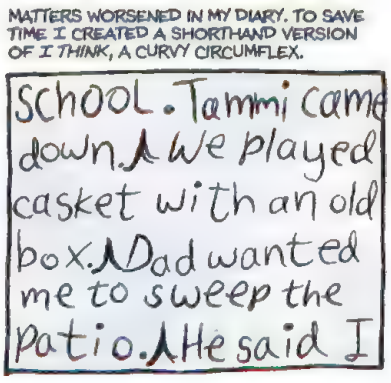

MATTERS WORSENED IN MY DIARY. TO SAVE TIME I CREATED A SHORTHAND VERSION OF I THINK, A CURVY CIRCUMFLEX.
school. Tammi came down. ^ We played casket with an old box. ^ Dad wanted me to sweep the patio. ^ He said I

Fig. 8: Small carets (FH, 142).

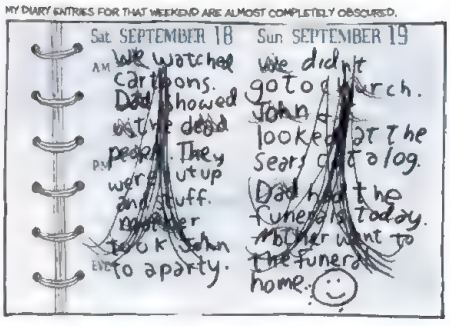

MY DIARY ENTRIES FOR THAT WEEKEND ARE ALMOST COMPLETELY OBSCURED.
Sat SEPTEMBER 18
Sun SEPTEMBER 19
AM
We watched cartoons.
Dad showed us the dead people. They were all dressed up and stuff.
to a party.
We didn't go to church.
looked at the Sears catalog.
Dad had the funerals today.
Mother went to the funeral home.

Fig. 9: Overpowering carets (FH, 148).

Alison's OCD ends in a way befitting its depiction: with panels. She starts to dictate her journal entries to her mother so that she won't be tempted to draw carets, and later sets up a wall calendar where she sets herself »deadlines by which to abandon specific compulsions« (*FH*, 149), interlaced with encouragements: »Do English workbook out of order« and, »Don't worry. You're safe« (*FH*, 149). The individual days on the wall calendar are highly suggestive of panels both visually and in their functioning as individual, but linked, moments in time and space. These panels within a panel signify the end of Alison's obsessive-compulsive disorder. They hint at the spatial re-ordering that is an integral part of OCD and of comic-making, but they also show the difference between a rearranging of space that is a helpful coping mechanism and one that perpetuates it: While counting plates until the number is even made the moment bearable without changing anything about the underlying pull of the OCD, Alison has here found a way to use the spatiality of her OCD against the disorder. The highly legible entries in the wall calendar are juxtaposed with two of Allison's almost illegible diary entries just one page before. Whereas these latter entries bear Allison's scribbled caret and are meant to doubly preserve the events they describe – first as memories by writing them down, then as uncertain truths by drawing over them–, the new ones point to a future to come. Filling these rectangles with writing fundamentally changes for Allison once it does not happen in retrospect but directed toward the future. This happens within a new spatial order which is the structure of a calendar whose pages cover an entire month, as opposed to the calendars that have pages for one or two days respectively (*FH* 148-149). This new spatiality produces an effect of relieve in Allison's constant struggle with OCD.

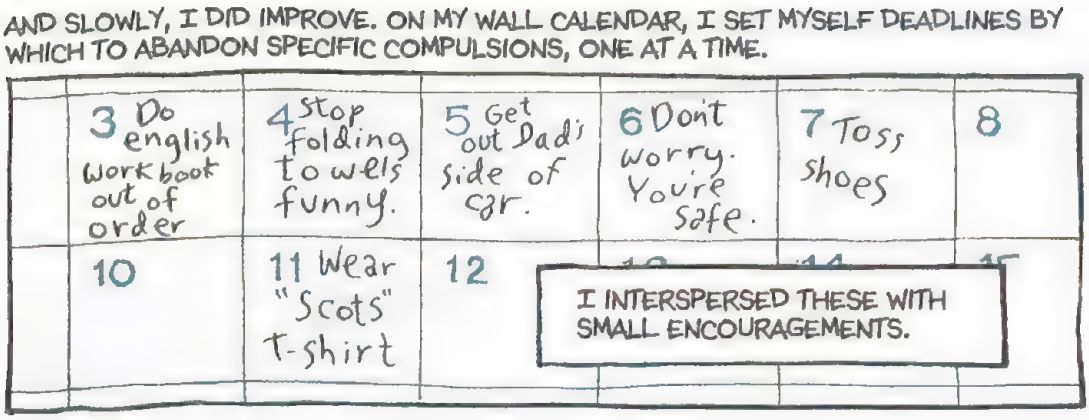

AND SLOWLY, I DID IMPROVE. ON MY WALL CALENDAR, I SET MYSELF DEADLINES BY WHICH TO ABANDON SPECIFIC COMPULSIONS, ONE AT A TIME.
3 Do english workbook out of order
4 stop folding towels funny.
5 Get out Dad's side of car.
6 Don't worry. You're safe.
7 Toss shoes
8
10
11 Wear "Scots" T-shirt
12
I INTERSPERSED THESE WITH SMALL ENCOURAGEMENTS.

Fig. 10: Alison's calendar is reminiscent of panels (*FH*, 149).

Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary

While Alison's OCD is depicted as mainly taking place in the medium of pictures and pens and emerges out of the family being an »artist's colony« where everyone is busy with their own com-

pulsions, Binky's OCD plays out differently. Early on Binky, who grows up in a repressed Catholic environment, starts thinking about penises at length and comparing his penis to the other boys' penises in the locker room. His shame about these thoughts only serves to intensify them, and soon two things start to happen: Firstly, he starts to see penises everywhere, and secondly, he starts to see the rays these ›penises‹ are emitting. The transformation of objects starts when his rubber bumper guard suddenly morphs, before his very eyes, into a penis. Here we see a similar process at work as in *Fun Home*: Binky's OCD alters the visual reality of his world, and the new visual reality is just as ›real‹ to him as the old one even though he knows that it's impossible for things to suddenly transform. The comic's panel structure replicates this equal footing of the real and the OCD-induced visual impression: For the reader, the bumper-guard-as-bumper-guard and the bumper-guard-as-penis are placed alongside each other much as they are for Binky.

Fig. 11: An everyday object morphs into a penis before Binky's eyes (*BB*, 33).

Binky confesses these ›sinful‹ thoughts to a priest, but when the priest is understanding, Binky seeks another priest so as »to make sure beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was completely guiltless…« (*BB*, 34) (Like Alison, he has no tolerance for doubt). The second priest compounds Binky's guilt, exacerbating his OCD: Now, he starts to see even his fingers as penises emitting rays.

While this changes the visual and bodily reality of Binky's life, in a next step, it forces Binky to rethink the geography around him.

Binky doesn't know how to move around in the world anymore: No matter where he turns,

UPON ARRIVING BACK IN HIS HOME-TOWN, IT OCCURS TO BINKY THAT HIS FINGERS ARE PHALLUSES, AND THAT RAYS EMANATE FROM THEM, ALSO!

Fig. 12: Binky's own fingers become penises (*BB*, 36).

the penis rays are contaminating places of worship around him. »Where can I go? What can I do? There must be hundreds of statues n' churches churches [sic] in the Chicago-land area! / No matter which way I turn (except when I'm facing towards Lake Michigan) the rays have gotta constantly intersect th' forbidden stuff!« (*BB*, 42). The penis rays are a result of Binky's strictly Catholic upbringing. Binky's internalized guilt seems to break out into the open (albeit an openness that only he can see) in the form of penis rays. But Binky's Catholic guilt remains, and so the worst thing for the penis rays to do is to touch places of worship and other religiously significant »forbidden stuff«.

Green puts the reader in a strikingly similar position to Binky, as he is asking us to read a book in which some pages consist of nothing but penises. He asks us to acknowledge all of these penises while also seeing the rest of the page despite being distracted or disoriented by their sheer number. The reader has to do what Binky is depicted as doing: Binky has to navigate a world that is almost hidden from view behind the penises and the rays they emit, and the reader has to navigate a page on which penises are screaming for her attention. We have to account for these penises and what they tell us about Binky's state of mind, but we have to dodge them at the same time, and in doing so we are sharing in a version of Binky's struggle.

The OCD forces Binky to remap his surroundings under these new circumstances. In *Fun Home*, obsessions like the ›noxious substance‹ change how Alison interacts with her immediate surroundings; for Binky it happens on a larger scale: He has to think not only of the churches he is walking past, but of the entire region around him, since the penis rays are potentially endless in their reach. The comic depicts the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of the rays: Though they don't seem to penetrate objects, their mere grazing of something pollutes it, which thereby enhances the shame that triggered the rays in the first place. The comic is unable to show the rays reaching the lakes and towns around Binky, which makes the potential scope as impossible to fathom for the reader as it is for Binky. In a similar way to Alison, Binky turns to an incantation as a last resort when remapping his surroundings fails: »Noyatin«. Binky's preoccupation with penises makes him feel so guilty that he starts exclaiming, »Not sin!«, which later becomes »No sin!« And finally »noyatin«, which is »invoked by the flustered lad at the drop of a hat, dozens of times every hour« (*BB*, 38). Green places the thought bubbles with »noyatin« on the same level as other characters' speech bubbles, as if showing Binky engaged in conversation. Ultimately, »noyatin« serves only to further Binky's isolation. In the end, he performs a kind of exorcism by sitting down in the midst of several Virgin Mary figurines and has his penis rays destroy them, and it is this act which frees him from his OCD.[4] Like Alison, he lets go of his compulsions by embracing the spatial aspect of his OCD: If his penis rays are everywhere, he might as well use them to destroy the thing that made them so potent in the first place.

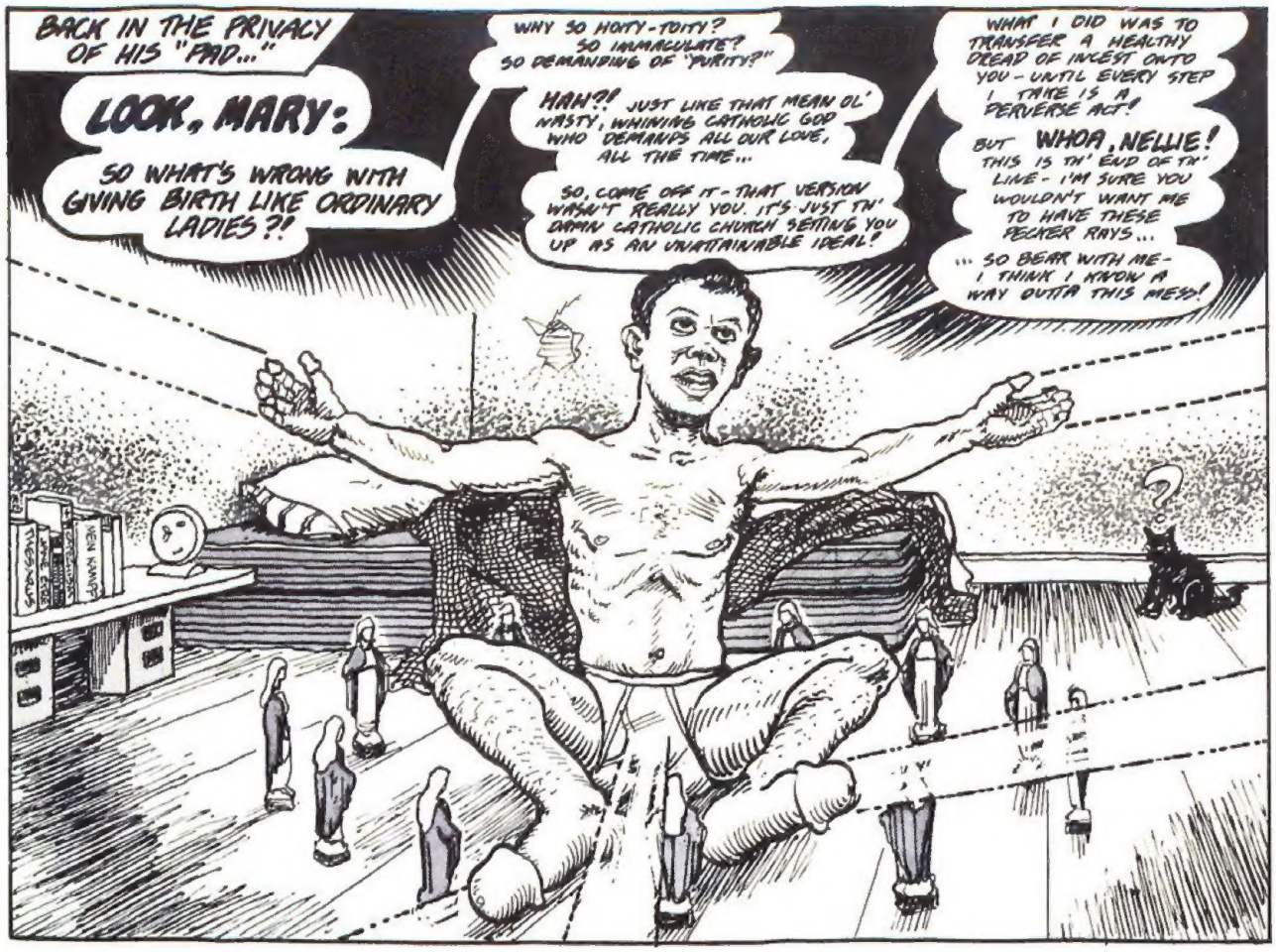

BACK IN THE PRIVACY OF HIS "PAD..."
LOOK, MARY:
SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH GIVING BIRTH LIKE ORDINARY LADIES?!
WHY SO HOITY-TOITY? SO IMMACULATE? SO DEMANDING OF "PURITY?"
HAH?! JUST LIKE THAT MEAN OL' NASTY, WHINING CATHOLIC GOD WHO DEMANDS ALL OUR LOVE, ALL THE TIME...
SO, COME OFF IT - THAT VERSION WASN'T REALLY YOU. IT'S JUST TH' DAMN CATHOLIC CHURCH SETTING YOU UP AS AN UNATTAINABLE IDEAL!
WHAT I DID WAS TO TRANSFER A HEALTHY DOSE OF INCEST ONTO YOU - UNTIL EVERY STEP I TAKE IS A PERVERSE ACT!
BUT WHOA, NELLIE! THIS IS TH' END OF TH' LINE - I'M SURE YOU WOULDN'T WANT ME TO HAVE THESE PECKER RAYS...
... SO BEAR WITH ME - I THINK I KNOW A WAY OUTTA THIS MESS!

Fig. 13: Binky performs an exorcism (*BB*, 48).

Conclusion

Alison's OCD is just one aspect of her childhood and adolescence portrayed in *Fun Home*, along with her sexual coming-of-age and her relationship to her father, while OCD is the main theme in *Binky Brown*. This does not detract from the intensity of OCD in *Fun Home*; particularly in »The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death«, OCD is just as dominant a factor as in *Binky Brown*. The fact that this chapter is placed in the context of Alison's life in a way Binky's OCD is not, however, exemplifies that OCD, as depicted in her account, consists of »thoughts or practices that take place and unfold within the context of everyday life and which interact with the other aspects of people's lives and identities« (Doel/ Segrott 2004, 600) rather than existing in a sealed-off space. In *Binky Brown*, though the penis rays take up so much (literal) space that it is hard to know what Binky's life would be without them, OCD is shown to have largely arisen from his Catholic upbringing, which forms as crucial a part of Binky's childhood as OCD does.

In both *Fun Home* and *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, the compulsions depicted are »spatial strategies [which] transform uncertain time into readable space« (Doel/ Segrott 2004, 610) by taking creative action. These actions range from re-arranging objects to changing one's walking route, from performing specific hand gestures to coming up with an all-purpose protective phrase, from uttering an incantation to staging an exorcism. Both comics show what these actions look like for someone looking in from the outside: Alison stands in a room muttering to herself and waving her hands, Binky running from small invisible enemies. But more pronouncedly, these two autobiographical comics make the experience of these types of OCD and the practices resulting from them readable and understandable: We know about the substance Alison is trying to disperse and the rays Binky is trying to dodge. The comics manage to evoke empathy by showing us Binky's and Alison's actions both as they experience them and as they appear to someone else, gesturing toward their complex experiences by rendering them in specific, graphic images as well as in words which complicate the image. This works because comics as a medium always »locates the reader in space« (Chute 2011, 108), and in these representations of OCD, where space is disputed and problematic, the sharing of space with Binky and Alison is what makes the sharing of unusual and inner experiences possible.

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List of Figures

Fig. 1: Fun Home, pp. 100–101.

Fig. 2: Fun Home, p. 142.

Fig. 3: Fun Home, p. 135.

Fig. 4: Fun Home, p. 135.

Fig. 5: Fun Home, p. 137.

Fig. 6: Fun Home, p. 137.

Fig. 7: Fun Home, p. 141.

Fig. 8: Fun Home, p. 142.

Fig. 9: Fun Home, p. 148.

Fig. 10: Fun Home, p. 149.

Fig. 11: Binky Brown, p. 33.

Fig. 12: Binky Brown, p. 36.

Fig. 13: Binky Brown, p. 48.

1] Throughout the article, I will refer to the writer of *Fun Home* as Bechdel and to the comic's protagonist as Alison.

2] This is further emphasized by the fact that »binky« is a colloquial term for a pacifier in American English.

3] »Caret« is the term used by, among others, Hillary Chute (cf. Chute 2010, 189).

4] In a panel discussion with Phoebe Gloeckner and Aline Chominsky-Crumb, Green says that he still sees the penis rays. »It is like having an annoying relative that you want to hit with a ball-peen hammer. You're tired of it. And besides, OCD [...] has a component of detachment that knows that this can't be right. And so it is recording and it is having an active dialogue that says, stop it, what are you doing? This is ridiculous. But then the more primitive side has to go back and check the story regardless. So perspective is vital to my orientation to drawing and to understanding how a ray can function« (Nelson 2014, 93).